

CENTRAL PACIFIC DRIVE

History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II



VOLUME III

HISTORICAL BRANCH, G-3 DIVISION, HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS

Central Pacific Drive

**HISTORY OF U. S. MARINE CORPS
OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II**

VOLUME III

by

HENRY I. SHAW, JR.

BERNARD C. NALTY

EDWIN T. TURNBLADH

Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps

1966

Other Volumes in this Series

I

LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr.

Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal

II

Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Maj Douglas T. Kane

Isolation of Rabaul

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 58-60002

Foreword

This book, the third in a projected five-volume series, continues the comprehensive history of Marine Corps operations in World War II. The story of individual campaigns, once told in separate detail in preliminary monographs, has been reevaluated and rewritten to show events in proper proportion to each other and in correct perspective to the war as a whole. New material, particularly from Japanese sources, which has become available since the writing of the monographs, has been included to provide fresh insight into the Marine Corps' contribution to the final victory in the Pacific.

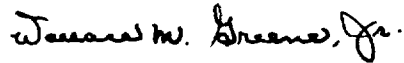
During the period covered in these pages, we learned a great deal about the theory and practice of amphibious warfare. But most of all we confirmed the basic soundness of the doctrine which had been developed in prewar years by a dedicated and farsighted group of Navy and Marine Corps officers. These men, the leaders and workers in the evolution of modern amphibious tactics and techniques, served their country well. Anticipating the demands of a vast naval campaign in the Pacific, they developed requirements and tested prototypes for the landing craft and vehicles which first began to appear in large numbers at the time of the Central Pacific battles. Many of the senior officers among these prewar teachers and planners were the commanders who led the forces afloat and ashore in the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas.

Allied strategy envisioned two converging drives upon the inner core of Japanese defenses, one mounted in the Southwest Pacific under General MacArthur's command, the other in the Central Pacific under Admiral Nimitz. Although Marines fought on land and in the air in the campaign to isolate Rabaul, and played a part significant beyond their numbers, it was in the Central Pacific that the majority of Fleet Marine Force units saw action. Here, a smoothly functioning Navy-Marine Corps team, ably supported by Army ground and air units, took part in a series of amphibious assaults that ranged in complexity from the seizure of tiny and heavily-defended islets, where there was little room for maneuver and no respite from combat, to large islands where two and three divisions could advance in concert.

It was my privilege to take part in much of this campaign, first as operations officer with Tactical Group 1 in the Marshalls and later in the same capacity with the 2d Marine Division in the Marianas. I prize the

associations formed then with the officers and men who won the victories, not only those of the Marine Corps but also those of the other services in our joint commands. Sparked by knowledge hard-won at Tarawa, we were able to plan and execute effectively the operations at Kwajalein and move forward, on incredibly short notice, to Eniwetok, seizing there the islands that guarded the lagoon from which most of our ships staged for the Marianas. In the fighting for Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, Marines proved conclusively that their demonstrated effectiveness in short-term amphibious assault carried over to extended combat ashore.

As the narrative in this volume clearly shows, victory against a foe as determined and as competent as the Japanese could not have been won without a high cost in the lives of the men who did the fighting. Our advance from Tarawa to Guam was paid for in the blood of brave men, ordinary Americans whose sacrifice for their country should never be forgotten. Nor will it be by those who were honored to serve with them.



WALLACE M. GREENE, JR.
GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Reviewed and approved
8 December 1965

Preface

The series of Central Pacific operations that began at Tarawa in November 1943 marked a period of steadily increasing momentum in our drive toward the Japanese home islands. To a great extent, these operations were periods of trial—and occasionally of error—when our amphibious striking force, the Fifth Fleet and the V Amphibious Corps, tested and proved the basic soundness of the doctrine, tactics, and techniques developed by the Navy and Marine Corps in the years before World War II. This was a time of innovation too, when new weapons, improved methods of fire support, and organizational developments all played a large part in our victories. The lessons learned in the Gilberts, reaffirmed and applied with increasing effect in the Marshalls and Marianas, were of priceless value in shortening the war.

Our purpose in publishing this operational history in durable form is to make the Marine Corps record permanently available for study by military personnel and the general public as well as by serious students of military history. We have made a conscious effort to be objective in our treatment of the actions of Marines and of the men of other services who fought at their side. We have tried to write with understanding about our former enemies and in this effort have received invaluable help from the Japanese themselves. Few people so militant and unyielding in war have been as dispassionate and analytical about their actions in peace. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Mr. Susumu Nishiura, Chief of the War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan and to the many researchers and historians of his office that reviewed our draft manuscripts.

This volume was planned and outlined by Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., senior historian assigned to the World War II historical project. Mr. Bernard T. Nalty, originally assigned as the author of this volume, wrote the narrative of the Gilberts and Marshalls campaigns and began the story of Saipan before he left the Marine Corps to become an historian with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his work, Mr. Nalty made use of the research material gathered for the monographs prepared by Captain James R. Stockman, *The Battle for Tarawa*, Lieutenant Colonels Robert D. Heinl, Jr. and John A. Crown, *The Marshalls: Increasing the Tempo*, and Major Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End*. Mr. Edwin T. Turnbladh finished the work on Saipan begun by Mr. Nalty and wrote the part concerning Tinian, using much of the research data amassed by Major Hoffman for his monograph, *The Seizure of Tinian*. Shortly after he had started working on the Guam narrative, Mr. Turnbladh left the Marine Corps to become an Air Force research analyst, and Mr. Shaw completed the book, revising and editing it for publication. In his research on the Guam operation, Mr. Shaw frequently consulted the material assembled for Major Orlan R. Lodge's monograph, *The Recapture of Guam*. The

appendices concerning casualties, command and staff, division table of organization, and chronology were prepared by Mr. George W. Garand; the remainder were completed by Mr. Shaw. Successive Heads of the Historical Branch—Colonel William M. Miller, Major John H. Johnstone, Colonel Thomas G. Roe, Colonel Joseph F. Wagner, Jr., and Lieutenant Colonel Richard J. Schening—made the final critical review of portions of the manuscript. The book was completed under the direction of Colonel Frank C. Caldwell, present head of the branch.

A number of leading participants in the actions described have commented on the preliminary drafts of pertinent portions of the book. Their valuable assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Several senior officers, in particular General David M. Shoup, Admiral Harry W. Hill, Lieutenant General Julian C. Smith, and Rear Admiral Charles J. Moore, made valuable additions to their written comments during personal interviews.

Special thanks are due to the historical agencies of the other services for their critical readings of draft chapters of this book. Outstanding among the many official historians who measurably assisted the authors were: Dr. John Miller, Jr., Deputy Chief Historian, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army; Mr. Dean C. Allard, Head, Operational Archives Branch, Naval History Division, Department of the Navy; and Dr. Robert F. Futrell, Historian, U.S. Air Force Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base.

First Lieutenant John J. Hainsworth, and his predecessors as Historical Branch Administrative Officer, First Lieutenant D'Arcy E. Grisier and Chief Warrant Officer Patrick R. Brewer, ably handled the many exacting duties involved in processing the volume from first drafts through final printed form. Many of the early preliminary typescripts were prepared by Mrs. Miriam R. Smallwood and the remainder were done by Miss Kay P. Sue, who expertly handled the painstaking task of typing the final manuscript for the printer. Much of the meticulous work demanded by the index was done by Miss Sue and Miss Linnea A. Coleman.

The maps were originally drafted by Corporal Robert F. Stibil; later revisions and additions were made by Corporal Thomas L. Russell. Official Department of Defense photographs have been used throughout the text.



W. R. COLLINS

MAJOR GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS
ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF, G-3

Contents

PART I LAUNCHING THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Early Plans for a War with Japan	3
2. The Central Pacific in Global Strategy	8
3. The Central Pacific Battleground	14

PART II THE GILBERTS OPERATION

1. Preparing to Take the Offensive	23
2. The Assault on Betio	53
3. Amphibious Victory	72
4. Completing the Capture	92
5. The Importance of GALVANIC	103

PART III THE MARSHALLS: QUICKENING THE PACE

1. FLINTLOCK Plans and Preparations	117
2. D-Day in the Marshalls	142
3. FLINTLOCK: Completing the Conquest	155
4. Westward to Eniwetok	181
5. The CATCHPOLE Operation	196
6. The Fruits of Victory	220

PART IV SAIPAN: THE DECISIVE BATTLE

1. Background to FORAGER	231
2. American and Japanese Preparations	251
3. Saipan: The First Day	263
4. The Conquest of Southern Saipan	280
5. The Fight for Central Saipan	305
6. Northern Saipan: End of the Campaign	332

PART V ASSAULT ON TINIAN

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. The Inevitable Campaign	355
2. J-Day and Night	377
3. Southward on Tinian	393
4. The Island Secured	411

PART VI THE RETURN TO GUAM

1. Preparing for Guam	431
2. W-Day	457
3. Consolidating a Foothold	479
4. Continuing the Offensive	503
5. Seizure of Northern Guam	535
6. Finish in the Marianas	568

APPENDICES

A. Bibliographical Notes	587
B. Guide to Abbreviations	597
C. Military Map Symbols	601
D. Chronology	602
E. Fleet Marine Force Status—30 October 1943	607
F. Table of Organization F-100—Marine Division	618
G. Marine Task Organization and Command List	620
H. Marine Casualties	636
I. Unit Commendations	638
Index	650

ILLUSTRATIONS

Betio Island Two Weeks After the Battle	41
Assault Troops on Betio	41
Damaged LVTs at Betio	58
Rubber Raft Carrying Wounded Marines	58
Squad Leader Points Out the Enemy	82
Reinforcements Wade Ashore at Betio	82
Machine Gun Ammunition Bearers	88
Flamethrower Smoke Over a Japanese Bombproof	88
Light Tanks and Artillery Leave Betio	96
Soldiers of 2/165 Assault Makin	96
Roi-Namur Under Bombing Attack	138
105mm Ammunition Being Unloaded At Mellu Island	146
24th Marines at Namur	146

ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued

PAGE

Marine Light Tank on Namur	164
Japanese Prisoners on Roi-Namur	164
Army 37mm Antitank Gun on Kwajalein	178
Marine 105mm Howitzers Set Up to Fire on Engebi	178
22d Marines Assault Waves Approach Engebi	202
Navy Fighter Attacks at Eniwetok Atoll	202
Marine Heavy Machine Guns on Eniwetok Island	212
Navy Corpsmen on Eniwetok Island	212
Riflemen of 22d Marines on Parry Island	223
Marianas Invasion Force at Eniwetok	223
Fire Team on Saipan	272
Japanese Medium Tanks Knocked Out at Saipan	272
Hand Grenades Tossed by Marines on Saipan	296
Skirmish Line of 27th Division Infantrymen	296
Marines Dig In on Saipan	324
Company CP in Garapan	324
Truck-Mounted Rocket Launchers	344
Flame Tank Hits Enemy Cave on Saipan	344
Observation Plane Over Northern Saipan	349
Supporting Cruiser Fires on Tinian	349
Medium Tanks Land on Tinian	386
2d Division Marines Advance on Tinian	386
Machine Gun on a Half-Track Lays Down Searching Fire	416
Pack Howitzer Fires on Enemy Caves on Tinian	416
3d Division Assault Troops on the Asan Beaches	464
Flamethrower Blasts Enemy Dugout on Guam	464
Shermans and Riflemen of the 1st Brigade Advance	513
Firing Line of 3d Division Riflemen	513
Pontoon Barge Off Guam	532
Guamanian Women in Refugee Camp	532
Column of 305th Infantry Moves Cross-Island	536
Jungle Trail Scouted by Marine Tanks and Infantry	536
Army Tanks Hit and Aflame At Yigo	558
Jungle Patrol Near Tarague	558
Corsairs of MAG-21 on Orote Airfield	581
B-29s Approach North Field on Guam	581

MAPS

1. Gilbert Islands	24
2. Tarawa Atoll, November 1943	33
3. Betio Island, 21-22 November 1943	69

MAPS—Continued

	PAGE
4. Makin Island, Showing Landings 20 November 1943 . . .	94
5. Conquest of Tarawa Atoll	99
6. Apamama Atoll	101
7. Marshall Islands	119
8. Kwajalein (Carillon) Atoll	126
9. Capture of Roi, 1 February 1944	162
10. Capture of Namur, 1–2 February 1944	168
11. Kwajalein Island, 1–4 February 1944	176
12. Eniwetok (Downside) Atoll	184
13. Seizure of Eniwetok Atoll, 18–22 February 1944	198
14. Southern Marianas	236
15. Saipan, Showing Japanese Defense Sectors	259
16. D-Day at Saipan	265
17. Saipan, 16–22 June 1944	287
18. Saipan, 23–30 June 1944	310
19. Saipan, 2–4 July 1944	334
20. Saipan, 5–8 July 1944	338
21. Tinian and Southern Saipan, Showing Japanese Defense Sectors and American Artillery Groupments	357
22. Tinian, 24–26 July 1944	382
23. Tinian, 27 July—1 August 1944	400
24. Guam, Showing Terrain Relief	438
25. Guam, Showing Japanese Dispositions, 21 July 1944	445
26. Southern Beachhead, 22–24 July 1944	481
27. 3d Marine Division Progress, 22–26 July 1944	490
28. Capture of Orote Peninsula, 25–30 July 1944	519
29. Guam, 28 July—4 August 1944	527
30. Guam, 5–10 August 1944	551
31. Schematic Sketch of Japanese Tank Action in 3d Marines Zone, 8–10 August	563
I. Scene of Battle 1943–1944	Map Section
II. Betio Island, Showing Main Japanese Defenses	Map Section
III. Betio Island, Landing and Situation 1800, 20 No- vember	Map Section
IV. Betio Island, Situation 1800 D+3.	Map Section
V. Roi and Namur Islands, Japanese Defenses Based on Post-Battle Study	Map Section
VI. Banzai Attack	Map Section
VII. W-Day on Guam, 21 July 1944	Map Section
VIII. Japanese Counterattack Plan, 25–26 July 1944	Map Section

PART I

Launching the Central Pacific Offensive

Early Plans for a War with Japan

Between November 1943 and August of the following year, American forces captured a series of key outposts in the Gilbert, Marshall, and Mariana Islands. Under the direction of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, amphibious forces advanced almost 2,000 nautical miles, thrusting from Tarawa on the outer fringe of the enemy's defenses to within aerial striking distance of the Japanese homeland. Although this Central Pacific campaign saw the introduction of many new weapons, the strategy of attacking directly westward against Japan had for several decades been under study by American war planners. (See Map I, Map Section.)

THE EVOLUTION OF ORANGE PLAN

American acquisition from Spain of Guam and the Philippine Islands was followed within a few years by the emergence of Japan as a world power. The question arose whether the Philippines, at the end of a long and vulnerable line of communications, could be defended against the modern armed forces of Japan. Since both the American Army and Navy would take part in defending these islands, the Joint Board, an agency created to develop plans and policies which would most effectively use the available forces of both services, turned its attention to developing a coordinated plan for a pos-

sible war in the Pacific. Defending the Philippines, however, seemed so difficult a task that President Theodore Roosevelt, writing in 1907, termed the islands "our heel of Achilles."¹

War plans of this era derived their titles from the code name of the probable enemy, and because Japan was designated ORANGE, the plan dealing with a conflict in the Far East was called ORANGE Plan. The earliest drafts required the Army to defend the Philippines until the fleet could shepherd reinforcements across the Pacific. Planners believed that the Japanese Navy would challenge the approach of the American armada and that the ensuing battle would decide not only the fate of the Philippines but the outcome of the war.

Naval strategists realized that before a relief expedition could be dispatched to the Far East, Japan certainly would have seized Guam, thus depriving the United States of its only fleet anchorage between Pearl Harbor and Manila Bay. Either Guam would have to be retaken or some other site occupied as a coaling and repair station. Whichever course of action was adopted, a landing force made up from the various ships' crews could not be used. With Japanese battleships lurking just over the hori-

¹ Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1931), p. 408.

zon, the Philippine relief expedition could not afford to have any large number of Bluejackets and Marines serving ashore and absent from their battle stations.²

Since the recapture of Guam or the taking of some other island—Truk was most frequently designated the prime objective³—was an integral part of the war at sea, such missions fell to the naval services and specifically to the Marine Corps, which was especially suited to those operations. During the Spanish-American War, a Marine battalion had landed at Guantanamo Bay to obtain a coaling station for the American ships blockading Cuba. Following the war, Marine units inherited the mission of occupying and defending advanced naval bases, and some naval officers began to urge that specially equipped defense forces be incorporated into each American squadron. Various planners cooperated in applying the lessons learned at Guantanamo Bay to the situation in the Pacific.

Among the first Marines to claim for their Corps an important role in an ORANGE war were Major Dion Williams and Captain Earl H. Ellis. Writing in 1912, Williams offered

tables of organization for a brigade to accompany the battle fleet and assist it by occupying poorly defended anchorages, emplacing weapons, and guarding against counterattack.⁴ Ellis, whose study appeared a few years later, agreed with the basic theory set forth by Williams, but he prophesied that the day might come when the enemy had fortified those islands suitable as advanced bases. Should this happen, the Marine contingent would be called upon to seize a defended beach. The capture of the objective rather than its subsequent defense would become the primary task of the Marines supporting the battle fleet.⁵

As a result of World War I, during which Japan and the United States had been allies, America's potential enemy gained control over the former German possessions in the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas. The Philippines were more vulnerable than before and Guam now was ringed by Japanese outposts. By 1921, the Marine Corps had evaluated recent gains by Japan and developed a realistic framework for its own operational and logistical planning. Staff officers believed that Guam and probably the Philippines would fall to the enemy shortly after the outbreak of war, and that Marine Corps units, in cooperation with Army troops, would face the task of seizing bases in the Marshalls, Carolines, Marianas, and Philippines. In addition, they assumed

² Capt William R. Shoemaker, USN, "Strategy of the Pacific: An Exposition of the ORANGE War Plan," dtd Aug14; Admin and StratSecs, ORANGE Plan, dtd Mar16 (NA folder no. 40, OP 29 folder no. 5, OAB, NHD).

³ RAdm Charles J. Moore cmts on draft MS and interview by HistBr, G-3, dtd 26Nov62, hereafter *Moore comments* (Gilberts Comment File, HistBr, HQMC). Admiral Moore, who served as Admiral Spruance's chief of staff, noted: "This Truk operation became an obsession of the Navy and Marine Corps and was not eliminated as an objective until the raid on Truk on 17 February 1944."

⁴ Maj Dion Williams, "The Naval Advanced Base," dtd 26Jul12 (NA folder no. 29, OP 29 folder no. 6, OAB, NHD).

⁵ Capt Earl H. Ellis, "The Security of Advanced Bases and Advanced Base Operations," ca. 1913 (IntelSec, DivOps and Trng Files, HistBr, HQMC).

that the Marine Corps was to take part in the final advance from the Philippines to Japan itself.⁶

Earl Ellis, now a major, concentrated on one segment of a war against ORANGE and devised Operation Plan 712, which dealt with the systematic reduction of the Marshall Islands. He also outlined the tactics to be used against such objectives as Eniwetok, Wotje, and Maloelap. Although his theories were limited by the equipment then available, he made several sound recommendations, urging among other things that troops fighting ashore have at their disposal the on-call fire of supporting warships. Yet, the amphibious assault depicted by Ellis was understandably crude in comparison to the skilfully coordinated landings of World War II.⁷

Whatever the flaws in his theory, Ellis's plan marked a complete break with tradition. No longer would Marines be used primarily to defend advanced bases. Instead, they would seize these bases from the enemy.

During the 1920s and 1930s, various Marine Corps officers elaborated upon Ellis' amphibious doctrine. Key Pacific islands were studied as potential battlefields, new types of landing craft were tested, and more efficient landing techniques came into use. Thus did the Marine Corps devote its energies to preparing for whatever amphibious missions might be assigned it in an ORANGE war.⁸

⁶ MarCorps War Plan against ORANGE, Resume, 1921 (War Plans File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁷ Maj Earl H. Ellis, OPlan 712, 1921 (War Plans File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁸ For the story of the Marine Corps role in

Framing the broad strategy for a possible war in the Pacific remained the task of the Joint Army and Navy Board. The ORANGE Plan, actually a preferred course of action rather than a detailed war plan, needed little revision, and the missions first assigned the services before World War I remained much the same as World War II approached. The Army was to deny Manila Bay to the enemy for as long a time as possible, while the Navy, capturing en route as many bases as it might need, steamed westward to defeat the Japanese fleet and break the siege of the Philippines. Although some planners doubted that the Philippine garrison could hold out until help arrived, and in fact believed that the islands were indefensible, the basic concept persisted throughout the 1930s.⁹ Finally, on the eve of war with the Axis powers, ORANGE Plan, which had presumed that Japan would

the development of amphibious doctrine and equipment, see LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1958), pp. 8-34, hereafter Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*.

⁹ Development of Joint Army-Navy War Plan ORANGE (RG 115, WPD 2720-22, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); Louis Morton, "Strategy and Command: Turning the Tide, 1941-1943—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II," MS in OCMH, pt II, pp. 24-31, 38-41, hereafter *Morton MS*. See Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), *passim*, for a discussion of the strong body of Army opinion which held that the islands could not be successfully defended with the forces available.

be the only enemy, was incorporated into an overall strategy designed to meet the needs of a two-ocean conflict.

STRATEGY FOR A GLOBAL WAR

As early as 1937, the United States Navy had sent a representative to Great Britain to discuss the employment of the American fleet in the event that these two nations should go to war with Japan. During the conversations, the possibility that Japan might join forces with Italy and Germany was explored. The British Admiralty was satisfied that, in the event of another world war, the United States Navy should concentrate in the Pacific, leaving the effort in the Atlantic to Great Britain and her continental allies.¹⁰ By June 1939, American planners were fully aware that Japan, possibly without the aid of Germany and Italy, might take advantage of the European crisis to seize British, French, or even American holdings in the Orient. Because the potential enemies might either act independently or combine their efforts, the Joint Board in June 1939 ordered that five new war plans be written, the RAINBOW series, each of which might incorporate the features of several "color" plans such as ORANGE. These new plans were designed to meet danger from various sources. Two of them dealt with the defense of the western hemisphere, two others with a war in the Pacific, and still another, RAINBOW 5, with a war in Europe or Africa that pitted the United States, France, and Great Britain against Germany and Italy.

¹⁰ *Morton MS*, pt. III, p. 2.

Although a greatly expanded RAINBOW 5 eventually became the basis of America's World War II strategy, work on this particular plan got off to a discouraging start, for France suddenly collapsed, and the Axis nations signed a formal military alliance. A two-ocean war now seemed probable, a conflict in which winning the battle of the Atlantic would be of more consequence than a victory in the Pacific. In the words of Admiral Harold R. Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, "if Britain wins decisively against Germany we could win everywhere; but . . . if she loses the problem confronting us would be very great; and, while we might not *lose everywhere*, we might, possibly, not win anywhere."¹¹ During January 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced a policy that emphasized the greatest possible aid to Britain, and a series of Anglo-American conferences began that same month which saw the two nations agree upon defeating Germany and Italy before turning their full might against Japan.¹²

Since the United States was now committed to assuming a strategic defensive on the outbreak of war in the Pacific, joint planners began rewriting RAINBOW 5 to include the probability that Japan would cooperate with her Axis partners in any future conflict.

¹¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare; 1941-1942—The War Department—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1953), p. 25.

¹² *Morton MS*, pt. III, pp. 34-35, 37; Louis Morton, "American and Allied Strategy in the Far East," *Military Review*, v. 29, no. 9 (Dec49), p. 33, hereafter Morton, "Strategy."

Essentially, this revision consisted in delaying indefinitely the Central Pacific campaign advocated by the ORANGE Plans. Instead of seeking immediately a decisive sea battle in Philippine waters, the Navy would be restricted in its early operations to attacks upon the Marshalls designed to prevent the enemy from concentrating

his forces against Singapore. In brief, the naval offensive against Japan, to which the Navy and Marine Corps had devoted so much thought, became but a single element in a global strategy designed primarily to crush Germany and Italy as rapidly as possible.¹³

¹³ Morton, "Strategy," pp. 37-38.

The Central Pacific in Global Strategy

The devastating raid on Pearl Harbor, coupled with the destructive attacks on airfields in the Philippines, enabled Japan to seize the initiative in the Pacific. Since many of its battleships had been disabled by enemy bombs and torpedoes, the American Navy could do nothing to divert the Japanese from Singapore. This bastion fell, the Netherlands Indies were overwhelmed, and the inadequate garrison holding out in the Philippines was encircled. Instead of conducting extensive raids in the Marshalls and preparing for an eventual drive across the Pacific, the United States and her Allies were trying desperately to hold a perimeter that extended from Burma through Australia to Hawaii and the Aleutians. As the triumphant Japanese pushed southward, existing American war plans were abandoned, and the security of Australia became the principal task of the Allies in the Pacific area.

Like the United States, Japan early in the war revised her Pacific strategy. The enemy's change of plans, however, was not caused by unforeseen setbacks but by the ease with which she had gained her primary objectives. Originally, Japan's principal aim was the conquest of the Netherlands Indies, Malaya, the Philippines, and Burma, areas rich in natural resources. Once these regions were taken, the

Japanese empire, now self-sufficient in oil, tin, and rubber, would be capable of defending a perimeter that stretched from the Kuriles, along the outer Marshalls, through the Bismarck Archipelago, across the Netherlands Indies, to Malaya and Burma. With Malaya, the Philippines, and the Netherlands colonies firmly in her control, Japan, rather than pausing as planned to consolidate these gains, decided to expand still farther.

These secondary conquests were in a sense defensive, for the enemy wished only to protect his earlier gains. Japan hoped to seize Port Moresby in New Guinea, capture Midway, establish outposts in the Aleutians, and isolate Australia by taking New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. Should these operations succeed, Australia would be useless as an Allied base, and the United States fleet would be confined within a triangle bounded by Alaska, Hawaii, and Panama.

This series of operations ended in disaster for the overextended enemy. The Battle of the Coral Sea stopped the immediate threat to Port Moresby. A month later the Japanese fleet met defeat off Midway, a blow that caused the cancellation of the offensive aimed at the line of communication with Australia. The attempt to gain a foothold in the Aleutians did succeed, but before the summer of 1942 had ended

the Americans took the initiative by landing at Guadalcanal in the lower Solomons.¹

*THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE*²

Since the war against the Axis powers was a combined effort, both the United States and Great Britain had a major voice in determining Allied strategy. The agency charged with developing the program of Allied military operations and allocating the resources of the two nations was the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), which was composed of the principal military advisers of President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the CCS gave to the United States primary responsibility for the war against Japan, excluding operations in defense of Malaya, Sumatra, and Burma. Thus, planning for the Pacific war fell to the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

By the end of 1942, Japan had lost the initiative, and the JCS could begin exploring the most effective ways of damaging the enemy. A limited offensive had already been approved for the South and Southwest Pacific Areas, an

operation undertaken to protect the line of communication to Australia. Now the JCS had to determine whether the advance northward and westward from Australia would prove more decisive than a drive across the Central Pacific and then to convince the other members of the CCS of the wisdom of its strategy.

The conference of Allied leaders at Casablanca in January 1943 gave American planners their first opportunity to present to the British their detailed views on Pacific strategy. Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, expressed his belief that an eventual goal of any Pacific offensive should be the Philippines. These islands lay astride the sea lanes over which rubber, oil, and tin were transported to Japan from the conquered territories. Submarines and aircraft operating from the Philippines could halt the flow of raw materials needed by Japanese industry.

Turning to the problem of selecting of the best route of advance toward the Philippines, King urged a move across the Central Pacific. Both the admiral and General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, hoped to outflank the defenses that the Japanese were preparing in the area north of Australia. This could be done by striking westward through the Marshalls and Carolines to the Marianas. Since planes flying from the Marianas could strike Japan while submarines based in these islands isolated the Philippines, King looked upon them as important intermediate objectives on the way westward.

British strategists, however, were not

¹ See Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, pp. 235-374, for the story of Marine operations in the Guadalcanal campaign.

² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CCS, Minutes of the 55th-60th Meetings 14-18Jan43 (ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); John Miller, Jr., "The Casablanca Conference in Pacific Strategy," *Military Affairs*, v. 13, no. 4 (Winter 49), p. 209.

willing to expand the effort against Japan at the expense of the European war. They agreed that limited offensives were necessary but wanted to undertake only those operations which would help protect India and Australia. British planners believed that the Allies should seize the key enemy base at Rabaul on New Britain, and recover Burma, while remaining on the defensive elsewhere in the Pacific.

Actually, a compromise was easily reached, once the JCS had agreed informally to avoid becoming involved in a series of offensives throughout the Pacific. The Burma operation could not begin immediately, and it appeared that Rabaul might fall in the near future. A Central Pacific campaign, limited in scope, would maintain pressure on the enemy during the period between the capture of Rabaul and the attack from India. After General Marshall stated that the move toward the Carolines would be undertaken with resources available in the Central Pacific Areas, the CCS recommended that the heads of state accept this broadening of the war against Japan. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, the final arbiters of Allied strategy, agreed with their advisers.

COORDINATING PACIFIC STRATEGY

Late in February 1943, Admiral King discussed with Admiral Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), means of carrying out the policies decided upon at Casablanca. Although General Douglas MacArthur, responsible for directing the war in the Southwest Pacific, had

disclosed only the general outline of his proposed operations, King and Nimitz attempted to plot the course of events in the Central Pacific. Nimitz wished to remain temporarily on the defensive, gradually whittling down Japanese strength while augmenting his own. During this build-up, submarines and aircraft would carry the war to the enemy. King agreed that to strike westward with the men, ships, and planes available in 1943 was to take a very considerable calculated risk, but he considered that the American forces must keep the initiative and that they had to be used in order to justify their allocation by the CCS.³

As a result of their conference, the two admirals agreed to a limited thrust in the general direction of the Philippines, but neither the objectives nor the timing of the attack were selected. In the meantime, the JCS had been arranging a conference of representatives from the Central Pacific, South Pacific, and Southwest Pacific Areas. At this series of meetings held in Washington, beginning on 12 March 1943, American planners heard additional details concerning the strategic design that had been prepared by General MacArthur.

Delegates to the Pacific Military Conference, as these meetings were termed, did not learn of MacArthur's planned return to the Philippines, for his representatives concerned themselves with immediate operations for the capture of Rabaul. ELKTON, the Rabaul plan,

³ FAdm Ernest J. King and Cdr Walter Muir Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1952), pp. 431-432, hereafter King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*.

called for continuing cooperation between the South and Southwest Pacific Areas in the capture of airfield sites on New Guinea, New Georgia, and Bougainville and in the seizure of two mighty bases—Kavieng on New Ireland and Rabaul itself.

Since a minimum of 79,000 Japanese troops were believed to be stationed in the area through which General MacArthur proposed to advance, his representatives told the conference that five additional divisions and as many air groups would be needed to sustain the offensive. Unfortunately, the JCS could spare neither the men nor the aircraft which MacArthur needed and had no choice but to order ELKTON revised. Instead of seizing Rabaul as quickly as possible, Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific would, during 1943, occupy Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands, continue the war in New Guinea, land on New Britain, and advance along the Solomons chain by way of New Georgia to Bougainville. These changes enabled MacArthur and Admiral William F. Halsey, who directed operations in the South Pacific theater, to get along with fewer troops, planes, and ships, some of which might now be employed in the Central Pacific.⁴ Although the Pacific Military Conference brought about a tailor-

ing of ELKTON to fit the resources available for the operation, no attempt was made to coordinate this offensive with the attack scheduled for the Central Pacific. The JCS postponed this decision until the next meeting of the CCS which was scheduled to convene at Washington in May 1943.

During the discussions held at Washington the American Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, a general statement of the strategy which would finally force the unconditional surrender of that nation, was presented for British approval. As at Casablanca, Admiral King urged that a powerful blow be struck through the Central Pacific, a more direct route toward the enemy heartland than the carefully guarded approach from the south. In Admiral Nimitz' theater, the American fleet could disrupt Japanese supply lines and hinder any effort to strengthen the defenses in the region. The vast expanse of ocean was dotted with potential naval bases, so the attackers could select their objectives with a view to inflicting the maximum strategic damage with the fewest possible men, ships, and aircraft. In short, the Central Pacific offered an ideal opportunity to use carrier task forces in conjunction with amphibious troops to launch a series of swift thrusts across hundreds of miles of water.

Admiral King, however, did not intend to abandon the Solomons-New Britain-New Guinea offensive. Allied forces fighting in this area could not simply suspend their operations and begin shifting men and equipment to the Central Pacific. Such a maneuver would alert the enemy to the im-

⁴ John Miller, Jr., *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul—The War in the Pacific—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1959), pp. 12–19. For the story of the role of the Marine Corps in operations against Rabaul, see Henry I. Shaw, Jr. and Maj Douglas T. Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul—History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. II (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1963), hereafter Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*.

pending offensive and weaken the defenses of Australia. Rather than hurl all Allied resources into a single drive, the American strategist desired two offensives, a major effort through the Central Pacific and a complementary push from the South and Southwest Pacific. Exact timing and the judicious use of available strength would keep the Japanese off balance and prevent their deploying men and ships from the southern defenses to the Carolines and Marshalls.⁵

After listening to Admiral King's arguments, the CCS accepted the American position with one major modification. Originally, the American plan had called for the Allies, while continuing the offensive against Germany, "to maintain and extend unremitting pressure against Japan with the purpose of continually reducing her military power and attaining positions from which her ultimate unconditional surrender can be forced."⁶ British members of the CCS considered this statement to be permission to strike at Japan without regard to the war against Germany, and all the American representatives except King agreed that the language was too strong. Finally, the British suggested that the effect of any extension of the Pacific war on overall strategy should be considered by the CCS before actual operations were begun, a sentence to this effect

⁵ Philip A. Crowl and Edmund G. Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls—The War in the Pacific—The U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1955), pp. 12–14, hereafter Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*.

⁶ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 441.

was inserted, and the document approved.⁷ Included among the goals proposed for 1943–1944 were the seizure of the Marshalls and Carolines as well as certain operations in Burma and China, the reconquest of the Aleutians,⁸ and a continuation of the effort in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas.⁹

FINAL APPROVAL FOR THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

As soon as the Washington Conference adjourned, King hurried to San Francisco to discuss with Nimitz the attack against the Marshalls. He repeated his conviction that the Mariana Islands formed the most important intermediate objective on the road to Tokyo and recommended that the conquest of the Marshalls be the first step in the march westward. Because the resources available to Admiral Nimitz would determine the final selection of targets, the two officers also discussed the possibility of striking first at the Gilberts, a group of islands believed to be more vulnerable than the Marshalls.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The invasion of Attu, one of the two Aleutian outposts seized by the Japanese, had begun on 11 May. Since Japan was unable to mount an offensive from this quarter, Attu could have been ignored, but its recapture, along with the planned reconquest of Kiska, would put additional pressure on the enemy, drive him from the fringes of the Western Hemisphere, and release American ships and troops for service elsewhere.

⁹ CCS 239/1, Operations in the Pacific and Far East in 1943–1944, dtd 22May43 (ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

¹⁰ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, pp. 443–444.

In the meantime, General MacArthur was informed of the proposed offensive in Nimitz' theater, an attack which was to be launched in mid-November by the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions. Neither the strategic plan nor its means of execution coincided with MacArthur's views. The general believed that the best avenue of approach to the Philippines was by way of New Guinea. ELKTON was but the first phase of MacArthur's promised return to the Philippines, and even this plan would be jeopardized by the loss of the two Marine divisions, then under his command.

MacArthur objected to the JCS that a campaign in the Central Pacific would be no more than a diversionary effort and that the withdrawal of the Marine units would delay the seizure of Rabaul. American strategists were able to effect a compromise by ordering the release of the 2d Marine Division, then in the South Pacific, while leaving the 1st Marine Division under MacArthur's control. Instead of capturing Rabaul, the South and Southwest Pacific forces were to neutralize and bypass this fortress.¹¹

Even before MacArthur had voiced his objections to the proposed Central Pacific operations, appropriate agencies of the JCS were at work selecting objectives for Admiral Nimitz. So little intelligence was

available on the Marshalls that planners urged the capture instead of bases in the Gilberts from which American reconnaissance planes could penetrate the neighboring island group. The defenses of the Gilberts appeared to be weaker than those of the Marshalls, and the proposed objective area was near enough to the South Pacific to permit naval forces to support operations in both places. Finally, control of the Gilberts would reduce Japanese threats to American bases in the Ellice Islands and Samoa and shorten as well as protect the line of communication to New Zealand and Australia.¹² On 20 July, the JCS directed Nimitz to begin planning for the capture of Nauru Island and of bases in the Gilberts. Well within American capabilities, this limited offensive would open the way into the Marshalls, which in turn would provide the bases for a later move to the Marianas.¹³

The following month, the CCS, meeting at Quebec, added the Gilbert Islands to a list of proposed Central Pacific operations designed to carry the war to the Marianas by the end of 1944.¹⁴ At last the stage was set for a Central Pacific offensive similar in concept to the campaign outlined in the earliest ORANGE Plans.

¹¹ Moore Comments.

¹² Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 21-24.

¹⁴ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 489.

¹¹ Miller, *CARTWHEEL*, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-225.

The Central Pacific Battleground

In American military terminology, the scene of the proposed offensive was the Central Pacific Area, a subdivision of the Pacific Ocean Areas that extended from the western coast of North America to the shores of China and reached from the equator northward to the 42d parallel. Canton Island, just south of the equator, was included in the Central Pacific, but the Philippines and those parts of the Netherlands Indies that lay in the northern hemisphere were not.¹ Admiral Nimitz, Allied commander-in-chief throughout the Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA), retained immediate control over operations in the Central Pacific. Within this area lay Micronesia, a myriad of islands of varying size and type, the region in which the forthcoming Central Pacific battles would be fought.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MICRONESIA ²

That part of Micronesia nearest Japan is the Mariana group of 15 vol-

canic islands. The Marianas curve southward from the 20th to the 13th parallel north latitude, with the center of the chain lying at about 144 degrees east longitude. The islands themselves, five of which were inhabited at the outbreak of war, are by Micronesian standards vast and mountainous. Guam, the largest, boasts an area of 228 square miles and peaks rising to over 1,000 feet. The highest elevation in the entire group is 3,166 feet on smaller Agrigan. Although the temperature is warm but not unpleasant, rains occur frequently, and there is the threat of typhoons and an occasional earthquake. Saipan, near the center of the Marianas, lies 1,285 nautical miles southeast of Yokohama. (See Map I, Map Section.)

South of the Marianas are the Carolines, a belt of over 500 volcanic islands and coral atolls extending eastward from Babelthup in the Palaus, 134 degrees east longitude, to Kusaie at 163 degrees. The long axis of this group coincides roughly with the seventh parallel north latitude. At the approximate center of the Carolines, 590

¹The Pacific Ocean Areas contained three subdivisions: the North Pacific Area north of the 42d parallel, the Central Pacific Area, and south of the equator, the South Pacific Area. Australia, its adjacent islands, most of the Netherlands Indies, and the Philippines formed the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur.

²Unless otherwise noted, the material in

this section is derived from: *Morton MS*, Introduction, p. 14; R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook*, 1944, North American ed., (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945), pp. 132-175; Fairfield Osborne, ed., *The Pacific World* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1944), pp. 155-159.

miles southeast of Saipan, is Truk, site of a Japanese naval base. The climate in this area is healthful, but the average temperatures are slightly higher than in the Marianas. Some of the larger Caroline Islands are covered with luxuriant vegetation.

Northeast of Kusaie are the Marshalls, a group of 32 flat coral atolls and islands scattered from 5 to 15 degrees north latitude and 162 to 173 degrees east longitude. The highest elevation in the entire group is no more than 40 feet. Kwajalein, the largest atoll in the world, lies near the center of the Marshalls, 955 miles from Truk. The climate is hot and humid.

On a map, the Gilberts appear to be an extension of the Marshalls, an appendix of 16 atolls that terminates three degrees south of the equator. Tarawa, slightly north of the equator, is 540 nautical miles southeast of Kwajalein and 2,085 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. Heat and humidity are extreme during the rainy season, the soil is poor, and portions of the group are occasionally visited by droughts.

The most striking feature of the Micronesian battlefield is its vastness. An island as big as Guam is little more than a chip of wood afloat in a pond. Although the total expanse of ocean is larger than the continental United States, the numerous islands add up to less than 2,000 square miles, a land area smaller than Delaware.

At one time, all of Micronesia except for the British Gilberts had belonged to Spain. The United States seized Guam during the Spanish-American War, and Spain later sold her remaining Central Pacific holdings to Ger-

many. After World War I, the League of Nations made Japan the mandate power in the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas (except Guam). Under the terms of the mandate, a reward for participating in the war against Germany, the Japanese were to govern and develop the islands, but were forbidden to fortify them. This bar to fortification was reinforced by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

In 1935, however, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations without surrendering her authority over the Pacific isles. Because of the strict security regulations enforced throughout the region, Japan succeeded in screening her activities for the six years immediately preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor. As late as 1939, a Japanese scholar assured the English-speaking peoples that his nation was not using the islands of Micronesia for military purposes.³ The strength of the defenses in this area would not be accurately determined until the Central Pacific campaign was underway.

THE ROLE OF THE MARINE CORPS

Throughout his arguments for an offensive across Micronesia, Admiral King had desired to use Marines as assault troops, for the Marine Corps had pioneered in the development of amphibious doctrine, and its officers and men were schooled in this type of operation.⁴ Major General Holland M.

³Tadao Yanaihara, *Pacific Islands under Japanese Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 305.

⁴King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 481.

Smith, who would command the V Amphibious Corps (VAC) for most of the Central Pacific campaign, had directed the amphibious training of Army troops that had participated in the invasion of North Africa. The same staff which would accompany him westward had helped him prepare elements of the 7th Infantry Division for the Attu operation.⁵ Experienced leadership would not be lacking, but veteran Marine divisions were at a premium.

Three Marine divisions, two of them proven in combat, were overseas when Admiral Nimitz received the JCS directive to prepare plans for a blow at the Gilberts. The 2d Marine Division, which was recovering from the malarial ravages of the Guadalcanal campaign, continued to train in the temperate climate of New Zealand after its release to Admiral Nimitz and incorporation into General Holland Smith's amphibious corps. The other malaria-riddled veteran unit of the battle for Guadalcanal, the 1st Marine Division, was in Australia. This division was left in General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area to execute a part of the revised ELKTON plan, the landing at Cape Gloucester on New Britain. The 3d Marine Division, untested in combat and new to Vice Admiral William F. Halsey's South Pacific Area, was completing its movement from New Zealand to the southern Solomons where it would train for the invasion

of Bougainville, an operation that was to begin in November 1943. Although still in training in the United States, the 4th Marine Division was scheduled to be ready by the end of 1943 for service in the Central Pacific.

Also present in the South Pacific were several other Marine combat organizations larger than a battalion in size. The 1st Raider Regiment was committed to the Central Solomons offensive; one battalion was already fighting on New Georgia, and another had just landed on that island. The 1st Parachute Regiment, an airborne unit in name only, was preparing in New Caledonia for possible employment during the advance into the northern Solomons. The 22d Marines, a reinforced regiment that eventually would see action in the Central Pacific, was at this time standing guard over American Samoa.⁶

Like the ground combat units, the bulk of Marine Corps aviation squadrons overseas at the time were stationed in the distant reaches of the South Pacific. An exception was the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing. Although the wing, at the time of the JCS directive, was preparing to shift its headquarters from Hawaii to Samoa and most of its squadrons were staging southward, one fighter and one scout-bomber squadron were in the Ellice group near the northern boundary of the South Pacific Area. Since the planes based in the Ellice Islands were short range craft and the pilots unused to carrier operations, neither unit could participate in the Gilberts

⁵ Jeter A. Isely and Philip Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 61-63, hereafter Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*.

⁶ StaSheet, FMF Gnd, dtd 31Jul43 (HistBr, HQMC).

invasion.⁷ At Tarawa, the 2d Marine Division would be supported by Navy carrier squadrons.

TACTICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MARINE DIVISION

The Marine division that figured in Admiral Nimitz' plans for the Gilberts was organized according to the E series tables of organization adopted in April 1943. With an authorized strength of 19,965 officers and men, the division was constructed in a triangular fashion—three infantry regiments, each of which had three infantry battalions. This arrangement enabled the division commanding general to hold in reserve an entire regiment without impairing the ability of his command to attack or to remain on the defensive. A regimental commander could exercise this same option with his battalions, and the battalion commander with his rifle companies, as well as with a headquarters company and a weapons company. An infantry regiment was authorized a basic strength of 3,242, a battalion 953, and a rifle company 196.

Supporting the divisional infantry components were an engineer regiment of three battalions (engineer, pioneer, and naval construction), an artillery regiment with three battalions of 75-mm pack howitzers and two of 105mm howitzers, Special Troops, and Service Troops. Special Troops, its total

strength 2,315, consisted of a light tank battalion which included the division scout company, a special weapons battalion equipped with antitank and anti-aircraft guns, and the division headquarters battalion which contained headquarters, signal, and military police companies. Service, motor transport, amphibian tractor, and medical battalions, with a total of 2,200 officers and men, made up Service Troops. The division chaplains, doctors, dentists, hospital corpsmen, and the Seabees of its naval construction battalion were members of the U. S. Navy.

The infantry units, too, had their own support elements. A weapons company armed with heavy machine guns, 37mm antitank guns, and self-propelled 75mm guns was under the direct control of each regimental commander. The battalion commander had his own company of heavy machine guns and 81mm mortars, and a company commander could rely on the light machine guns and 60mm mortars of his weapons platoon.

The basic structure of both division and regiment was altered when necessary. Troops normally under corps control, such as reconnaissance, medium tank, or artillery units, might be used to reinforce the division. For amphibious operations, each regiment was made a combat team by the addition of troops from the artillery and engineer regiments, the amphibian tractor, medical, motor transport, service, tank, and special weapons battalions. These attachments increased the strength of the regiment to as much as 5,393. Some of the additional troops were reassigned to the infantry battalions, so that the combat team

⁷ StaSheet, Air, dtd 31Jul43 (HistBr, HQ-MC); Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), pp. 222, 224, 438-439, hereafter Sherrod, *Marine Air History*.

generally consisted of three landing teams, each with its own engineer, artillery, medical, and tank support.⁸

THE ENEMY'S BASIC TACTICAL ORGANIZATION

During the drive westward, Marine divisions would be opposed by Japanese *Special Naval Landing Forces* as well as by the enemy's infantry divisions. When employed in the attack, a *Special Naval Landing Force* usually consisted of two infantry companies and a heavy weapons unit, plus communications, engineer, medical, supply and transportation elements. With a strength of 1,000–1,500, this organization was comparable in size to a Marine battalion reinforced as a landing team. Artillery support for the landing force was provided by from 8 to 24 guns and howitzers ranging from 70mm to 120mm.

On the defense, however, a *Special Naval Landing Force* could be reinforced to a strength of 2,000, with an appropriate increase in the number of automatic weapons and the addition of antitank guns, mortars, or both. In addition, the Marines might expect to encounter, among the naval units, trained guard forces. Construction or pioneer units, both types composed in part of Korean laborers, were engaged in building airfields and defensive installations throughout Micronesia. The strength of these organizations

depended on the particular project assigned them, and their zeal for combat and state of training varied according to the policies of individual island commanders.

Like the Imperial Navy, the Japanese Army habitually altered the strength and composition of its field units to meet the task at hand. The standard infantry division consisted of some 20,000 men organized into a cavalry or reconnaissance regiment, an infantry group of three regiments, and artillery, engineer, and transportation regiments. Signal, hospital, water purification, ordnance, and veterinary units were considered parts of the division headquarters. For the most part, the Japanese adhered to the triangular concept, for each of the three infantry regiments of 3,845 men contained three 1,100-man battalions. If judged necessary, the size of a division could be increased to over 29,000 officers and men.

Usually, these reinforcements were troops not assigned to any division, for the Japanese Army had created a bewildering variety of independent units. Some were larger than the ordinary infantry regiment; others as small as a tank company. By combining independent units or attaching them to divisions, the enemy was able to form task forces to capture or defend a particular place.⁹

These were the forces that would battle for Micronesia. With many potential anchorages in the region, Admiral Nimitz could feint with his carriers before striking with his as-

⁸ OrgChart, MarDiv, dtd 15Apr43 (SubjFile: T/Os, HistBr, HQMC). A copy of this table of organization and equipment is contained in Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, pp. 571–573.

⁹ WD, TM-E 30–480, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, dtd 15Sep44, pp. 19–21, 76–81.

sault troops. Yet, the task of destroying the individual enemy would inevitably fall to the infantryman supported by aircraft, naval gunfire, and all the firepower organic to the Marine division.

PART II

The Gilberts Operation

Preparing to Take the Offensive ¹

PLANNING FOR OPERATION GALVANIC

The summer of 1943 saw a revival of the strategy contained in both ORANGE and RAINBOW Plans as well as rigorous training in amphibious techniques, methods that stemmed from further elaboration of the theories of amphibious warfare first advanced by Major Earl Ellis. The Central Pacific offensive, for so many years the key-

stone of American naval planning, was about to begin with operations against the Gilbert Islands.² The attack on this group of atolls would test the Marine Corps concept of the amphibious assault, an idea originated by Ellis and greatly modified by his successors. The major had been confident that a defended beach could be taken by storm, and since his death new equipment and tactics had been perfected to aid the attackers, but the fact remained that such an operation had never been tried against a determined enemy dug in on a small island. Was Ellis' conclusion still valid? Could an army rise out of the sea to overwhelm prepared defenses? These questions soon would be answered. (See Map I, Map Section.)

On 20 July the JCS ordered Admiral Nimitz to begin preparing for the capture, development, and defense of bases in the Gilbert group and on Nauru Island. This directive also provided for the occupation of any other islands that might be needed as air bases or naval facilities for the carrying out of the primary mission. GALVANIC was the code name assigned to the Gilberts-Nauru venture. The operation was intended to be a preliminary step to an attack against the Marshalls.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: CinCPac OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43, hereafter *CinCPac OPlan 1-43*; ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43, dtd 25Oct 43, hereafter *ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43*; V PhibFor AR Gilbert Islands, dtd 4Dec43, hereafter *V PhibFor AR*; CTF 54 OPlan A2-43, dtd 23Oct43; CTF 53 OpO A101-43, dtd 17Oct 43, hereafter *CTF 53 OpO A101-43*; VAC AR GALVANIC, dtd 11Jan44, hereafter *VAC AR*; VAC OPlan 1-43, dtd 13Oct43; 2d Mar Div OpO No. 14, dtd 25Oct43, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpO No. 14*; TF 11 AR Baker Island, Sep43 (Baker Island Area OpFile, HistBr, HQMC); Samuel Eliot Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls, June 1942-April 1944—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VII (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960 ed.), hereafter *Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Capt James R. Stockman, *The Battle for Tarawa* (Washington: HistSec, DivPubInfo, HQMC, 1947), hereafter *Stockman, Tarawa*. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited in this part are located in the Gilberts Area Op File and the Gilberts CmtFile, HistBr, HQMC.

² It is interesting to note that the Gilberts did not appear as an objective in the ORANGE Plans. *Moore Comments*.



At the same time, a lodgement in the Gilberts, in addition to bringing the Marshalls within range of land-based bombers, also would insure the safety of Samoa and shorten the line of communication to the South and Southwest Pacific.

The bulk of the Pacific Fleet, the Central Pacific Force under Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, was committed to the Gilberts operation. As commander of the GALVANIC expedition, Spruance was the immediate subordinate of Admiral Nimitz. The actual landings would be conducted by V Amphibious Force, headed by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner. This organization, established on 24 August 1943, was similar to the amphibious force that had carried out the Attu invasion. Within Turner's force was V Amphibious Corps (VAC), organized on 4 September and commanded by Marine Major General Holland M. Smith. The general had with him the same staff, with representatives from all services, that had aided in preparing for the Aleutians offensive. Like the original Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, the new VAC was to train and control the troops required for future operations in the Pacific Ocean Areas.

Nimitz had entrusted GALVANIC to a group of experienced Navy and Marine Corps officers. Spruance had commanded a carrier task force at the Battle of Midway; Turner had led the amphibious force that landed the Marines at Guadalcanal and Tulagi and had directed a similar force in operations against New Georgia; and Holland Smith had helped train troops for amphibious operations in Europe, North Africa, and the Aleutians. Pre-

parations for the Gilberts invasion had been placed in capable hands.

The man who would actually command the amphibious phase of the Tarawa operation, Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, reported to Admiral Turner on 18 September 1943. Hill, a veteran battleship and escort carrier group commander fresh from the South Pacific battles, was designated Commander, Amphibious Group 2. His group would transport, land, and support the assault troops at Tarawa, while a similar group, which Admiral Turner retained under his direct command, would be part of the attack force at Makin. When Hill arrived, the projected D-Day for GALVANIC was 1 November, which was later changed to 20 November, a date which provided only two months to weld a widely scattered force of ships and troops into an effective team.³

The major Marine unit available to Turner's amphibious force was the 2d Marine Division, commanded by Major General Julian C. Smith. This division had fought at Guadalcanal and was currently reorganizing in New Zealand. The division commander, a Marine Corps officer since 1909, joined the unit after it had sailed from Guadalcanal; but during his career he had seen action at Vera Cruz, in Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua, and had served in Panama and Cuba as well. In the words of the division historian, Julian Smith's "entirely unassuming manner and friendly hazel eyes clothed a determined personality

³ Adm Harry W. Hill interview with HistBr, G-3, HQMC and cmts on draft MS, dtd 4Oct 62, hereafter *Hill interview/comments*.

that could be forcefully displayed in decisive moments. His concern for his men was deep and genuine.”⁴

Because of the scope of the proposed Central Pacific campaign and the need in other theaters for Marine amphibious divisions, Army troops appeared certain to be needed for GALVANIC and later operations. Preliminary training, administration, and logistical support of these Army divisions fell to the Commanding General, Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson. In carrying on his work, General Richardson was subject to the direction of Admiral Nimitz.

When the JCS first began exploring the possibility of a thrust into the Gilberts, Admiral King had urged that only Marines be used in the operation. General MacArthur's needs for amphibious troops and the shortage of transports to bring a second Marine division to the Central Pacific prevented the carrying out of King's recommendation. General Marshall, on 29 July offered an Army unit instead, the 27th Infantry Division then in Hawaii, close to the scene of future combat. Although the unit had received no amphibious training, this was a deficiency that Holland Smith's VAC could solve.

A part of the New York National Guard, the 27th Division had been inducted into the federal service in the fall of 1940. Upon the outbreak of war, the unit had been ordered from Fort

McClellan, Alabama, to various installations in California. After standing guard on the Pacific coast, the division sailed in March 1942 for the Hawaiian Islands. In command of the 27th Division when it was assigned to Operation GALVANIC was Major General Ralph C. Smith, who had studied and later lectured at France's *Ecole de Guerre* and who was considered a keen tactician.⁵

During the planning for and fighting on Guadalcanal, a naval officer, Admiral Turner, had the final responsibility for the conduct of operations, both afloat and ashore. The views of the admiral, a man sure in his opinions and forceful in presenting them, did not always coincide with those of the landing force commander, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, when the question was the proper employment of troops. General Vandegrift, who recognized the absolute necessity of naval control of the assault, wanted unquestioned authority over operations ashore. A dispatch to Admiral King proposing this command setup was drafted in late October 1942 by the Commandant, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, who was on an inspection trip to the South Pacific, signed by Admiral Halsey, and endorsed by Admiral Nimitz. On his return to Washington, Holcomb indicated to King that he concurred in the concept that the landing force and naval task force commanders should have equal authority, reporting to a joint superior, once the landing phase of the amphibious assault was com-

⁴ Richard W. Johnston, *Follow Me! The Story of the 2d Marine Division in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 89, hereafter Johnston, *Follow Me!*

⁵ Edmund G. Love, *The 27th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), pp. 11-22.

pleted.⁶ Although such a change in doctrine evolved eventually, in the relatively brief operations against the small atolls of the Central Pacific, the role of the naval commander in tactical operations remained paramount.

In setting up the planning machinery for GALVANIC, Admiral Spruance followed the Guadalcanal precedent and made VAC completely subordinate to Turner. Holland Smith, a man just as forceful and outspoken as Turner, objected vigorously and successfully to this setup. Spruance so revised his system that Holland Smith and Turner faced each other as equals throughout the planning phase. On the surface it would seem that the Navy officer and the Marine had equal voice in shaping plans for GALVANIC, but Spruance naturally looked upon Turner as his principal amphibious planner. The decisions of the force commander, however, depended upon the scheme of maneuver advanced by the corps commander, in this case Holland Smith.⁷

In one respect, their dislike for Nauru as an objective, Spruance, Turner, and Holland Smith were in complete agreement. They did not want to divide the available naval forces and conduct two simultaneous amphibious operations separated by 380 miles, with the enemy naval base at Truk beyond the reach of any land-based reconnais-

sance planes. Admiral Spruance vigorously protested the selection of Nauru and argued for the substitution of Makin Atoll in its stead. He recalled:

Kelly Turner and I both discussed this situation with Holland Smith at length. It appeared to me that Nauru had been useful to the Japanese as a position from which to search to the southward the area between the Gilbert and Ellice Groups on the east and the Solomons on the west. Once this area was controlled by us, Nauru was not needed by us, and we could keep it pounded down. On the other hand, Makin was 100 miles closer to the Marshalls where we were going, and it tied in well from the point of view of fleet coverage with an operation against Tarawa. The more we studied the details of capturing Nauru, the tougher the operation appeared to be, and finally it seemed doubtful that the troops assigned for it could take it. The transports available for trooplift were the limiting factor. Makin . . . was an entirely suitable objective, and its capture was well within our capabilities.⁸

The upshot of these discussions was that Holland Smith offered a revised estimate of the situation, endorsed by Turner, that led to a revision of the concept of GALVANIC. On 19 September, the general pointed out that at least one entire division would be required to seize rocky, cave-riddled Nauru. In addition, this island lacked a lagoon as an anchorage for small craft and had only a tiny airfield. This estimate was presented to Nimitz on 24 September, while Admiral King was in Pearl Harbor for a conference with CinCPac, and Spruance recommended to both that the Nauru portion of the plan be scrapped. Proposed sub-

⁶ Gen Thomas Holcomb interview by LtCol Robert D. Heintz, Jr., dtd 12Apr49, cited in Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw, *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, p. 342.

⁷ Adm Raymond A. Spruance, "The Victory in the Pacific," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, v. 91, no. 564 (Nov46), p. 544; *Moore comments*.

⁸ Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 24Jul62.

stitute for this target was Makin Atoll, which boasted a lagoon and ample room for airstrips. The defenses of Makin appeared weaker than those of Nauru, its beaches better, and its location near enough to Tarawa to permit the concentration of American shipping. Convinced by the arguments of the GALVANIC commanders, "Admiral King agreed to recommend to the JCS the substitution of Makin for Nauru."⁹

There was little quarrel with the selection of Tarawa as an objective of the GALVANIC forces. Although this atoll was heavily defended, its capture would cut in half the distance that American bombers would have to fly in raiding the Marshalls. Also, Betio Island in this atoll was the nerve center for the Japanese defense of the Gilberts. The responsible planners believed that the Gilberts could not be neutralized with the American strength then available until Tarawa was overrun.

The capture of Apamama was also thought necessary if the Americans were to consolidate their hold on the Gilberts. Again, the primary consideration was to gain an air base from which to strike the Marshalls. This atoll promised to be the least difficult of the three objectives that Central Pacific planners wished to include in GALVANIC.

The JCS promptly agreed to the substitution of Makin for Nauru, and on 5 October, Admiral Nimitz issued Operation Plan 13-43, containing the revised concept of GALVANIC. This document assigned Admiral Spruance the

mission of capturing, developing, and defending bases at Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama. The operation was designed to gain control of the Gilberts and by so doing to smooth the way into the Marshalls, improve the security and shorten the line of communication with Australia, and support operations in the South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, and Burma areas by exerting pressure on the Japanese. (See Map 1.)

*THE INTELLIGENCE EFFORT*¹⁰

Although the Gilberts group was not included by popular journalists among "Japan's Islands of Mystery," American planners knew very little about the one-time British possession. Charts and tide tables provided by the Navy Hydrographic Office proved unreliable. In fact, the maps prepared by the Wilkes expedition of 1841 were found to be as accurate as some of the more modern efforts. If the assault troops were to get ashore successfully, detailed intelligence had to be obtained on beach conditions, tides, and the depth of water over the reefs that fringed the atolls. Principal sources of such information were photographs taken from aircraft and submarines as well as interviews with former residents of the islands.

American photo planes, both land-

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Additional sources for this section include: VAC G-2 Study, TO Gilbert Islands, Nauru, Ocean, dtd 20Sep43, pp. 21-48, 61-67; 2d MarDiv Est of Sit-Gilberts, dtd 5Oct43; 2d MarDiv SupplEst of Sit, dtd 25Oct43; 2d MarDiv D-2 Study of Makin Island and Little Makin, n.d.; 2d MarDiv D-2 Study of Tarawa, n.d.; IntelEst, Anx D to 2d MarDiv OpO No. 14.

based Liberators (B-24s) and carrier aircraft, soared over Tarawa on 18-19 September and again on 20 October. Makin was photographed on 23 July and 13 October. Of the two atolls, Tarawa received better coverage, for only vertical aerial photos of Makin reached the joint intelligence center. Without oblique prints, photo interpreters had difficulty in estimating beach conditions and determining the exact nature of shore installations.

In spite of this handicap, and the inability of interpreters to gauge the depth of water from aerial photographs alone, other information was evaluated in conjunction with the photographs and the work done by intelligence officers proved to be extremely accurate. The remarkable ability of the aerial camera to locate enemy positions and the skill with which these photographs were analyzed enabled the interpreters to estimate the size of the enemy garrison from a picture that showed the shoreline latrines on Betio.

In commenting on this impressive bit of detective work, the 2d Division operations officer (D-3),¹¹ later called the picture they used "the best single aerial photo taken during WWII."¹² Using it, he was able to select the spot where he thought "the headman's CP was, since it was the only place with a

baffle and sufficient room to drive a vehicle between the baffle and the door."¹³ He also was able to determine which of the latrines were probably used by officers by the difference in type. Figuring that the Japanese would assign more men per latrine than an American force, he was able to present intelligence officers with an interesting problem and method of finding the size of the garrison. Utilizing these factors, the D-2 (intelligence) section came up with a figure that Japanese documents later indicated was within a few men of the actual count. The D-3 commented: "This didn't help much in determining strategy and tactics, but it provided the valuable knowledge of enemy strength. By the laws of chance we happened to strike it right."¹⁴

Additional and extremely valuable data on reefs, beaches, and currents was obtained by the submarine *Nautilus*. This vessel had been fitted out to take pictures of the atolls through her periscope. None of the cameras issued for this mission could take an intelligible picture, but fortunately one of her officers owned a camera that would work? For 18 days *Nautilus* cruised through the Gilberts, pausing to take panoramic shots of Apamama, Tarawa, and Makin. The negatives did not reach Hawaii until 7 October, but the photos were developed, interpreted, and

¹¹ During much of World War II, Marine division general staff officers were designated D-1, D-2, D-3, and D-4, and comparable corps staff officers as C-1, etc. Eventually, the Marine Corps adopted the Army system of designating all general staff officers at division and above as G-1, etc.

¹² Gen David M. Shoup interview with Hist Br, G-3, HQMC and cmts on draft MS, dtd 14Aug62, hereafter *Shoup interview/comments*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tests of this camera, made with the cooperation of VAC and 27th Division G-2 officers, "resulted in the development of a holding frame, sequence timing for stereo overlap, etc." Col Cecil W. Shuler comments on draft MS, dtd 12Dec62.

the information contained in them disseminated in time for the invasion.

Intelligence officers also were able to gather together 16 persons familiar with the Gilberts. Travelers, traders, or former residents of the British colony, they were attached to Admiral Turner's staff. Those most familiar with Tarawa were sent to Wellington where the 2d Marine Division was training, while those who knew Makin best were assigned to the 27th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Additional intelligence on Makin came from Lieutenant Colonel James Roosevelt, who had fought there as executive officer of the 2d Marine Raider Battalion during the raid of 17-18 August 1942.

Tarawa, the intelligence officers found, was the sort of objective that Earl Ellis had pictured when he first began his study of the amphibious assault. The target for which the 2d Marine Division had been alerted to prepare was a coral atoll triangular in shape, two legs of the triangle being formed by reef-fringed chains of islands and the third by a barrier reef. The southern chain measured 12 miles, the northeastern 18 miles, and the western or reef side 12½ miles. A mile-wide passage through which warships could enter the lagoon pierced the coral barrier. (See Map 2.)

Key to the defenses of Tarawa was Betio, southwestern-most island in the atoll, just three and one-half miles from the lagoon entrance. On Betio the Japanese had built an airfield, and bases for planes were what the Americans wanted. Like the rest of Tarawa, this island was flat; indeed, the highest point in the entire atoll was but 10 feet above sea level. Betio, com-

pletely surrounded by reefs, was only 3 miles long and some 600 yards across at its widest point. The Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, after weighing all the evidence estimated that between 2,500 and 3,100 Japanese troops were crammed onto the island. The intelligence officers also reported that the enemy might have 8 or 9 coastal defense guns including 8-inch guns¹⁶, 12 heavy antiaircraft guns, 12 medium antiaircraft guns, and emplacements for 82 antiboat guns and 52 machine guns or light cannon. The fighting on Betio would be bloody, but a difficult problem had to be solved before the Marines could come to grips with the enemy. A way had to be found to cross the reefs that encircled the island. (See Map II, Map Section.)

The best solution would have been to land the division in amphibian tractors (LVTs), for these vehicles, like the legendary river gunboats of the American Civil War, could navigate on the morning dew. Unfortunately, the tractors were in short supply, so that most of the troops would have to come ashore in LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel), boats which drew about 3½ feet of water. Because the assault on Betio had been scheduled for 20 November, a day on which the difference between high and low tide would be slight, the attackers could not rely on any flood of water to float them over the troublesome reef. The success of the operation well might de-

¹⁶ The determination of the caliber of these guns was made by relating their size in aerial photographs to the known dimensions of wrecked aircraft on the airfield at Betio. *Shoup interview/comments.*

pend upon an accurate estimate on the depth of the water off Betio.

The first estimate made by amphibious force intelligence officers predicted that during the period of lowest tides no more than two feet of water would cover the reefs off the northern coast of Betio. Turner's staff also was aware that during the lowest period, tides at the island might ebb and flow several times in a single day. There was the remote possibility of a freak "dodging tide," a tide with an eccentric course that could not be foreseen or predicted. Such tides had been reported, but few of the islanders had experienced one. On the other hand, those officers responsible for GALVANIC could take heart from the fact that some of the island traders who had sailed among the Gilberts predicted that there would be five feet of water, more than enough for the landing craft. Some of the Americans chose to be optimistic.

Among those who entertained doubts concerning the depth of water over reef at Betio was Major F. L. G. Holland, a New Zealander and former resident of Tarawa Atoll. Assigned to the staff of General Julian Smith, Holland did not accept the estimate of five feet, but he could not disprove the tide tables prepared by his fellow experts. He could, however, point out that during the neap period tides ebbed and flowed irregularly and warn the Marines to expect as little as three feet of water at high tide.

After listening to the New Zealand major, Julian Smith decided to prepare for the worst. The troops embarked in LCVPs were briefed to be ready to face the possible ordeal of wading ashore in

the face of Japanese fire. The best that Julian Smith could foresee was a 50-50 chance that landing craft would clear the reef.

Hydrographic and reef conditions also helped dictate the choice of landing beaches. On the south or ocean side of Betio, the reef lay about 600 yards from the island proper, but heavy swells rolled in from the open sea, a factor which might complicate the landings. To land directly from the west would mean crossing both the barrier and fringing reefs as well as battling strong and unpredictable currents. Aerial photographs showed that the enemy defenses were strongest on the seaward side and that the beaches were heavily mined.¹⁷ The choice, then, narrowed to the lagoon side where the reef, though wide, rose gradually to the surface. In addition, the island itself would serve as a breakwater to ships maneuvering within the lagoon.

Makin, northernmost of the Gilberts, was the objective of a reinforced regiment of the 27th Infantry Division. Like Tarawa, this atoll was shaped like a distorted triangle. Southeast of the spacious lagoon lay the large islands of Butaritari and Kuma. A long reef

¹⁷ VAC and 2d Division planners could plainly see the seaward beaches were mined, but the lagoon side was a different matter. The enemy troops there "were in the business of working on their defenses—unloading steel rails, concrete, etc., besides their regular logistic support within the lagoon. . . . The question was what you would do if you were on the island," General Shoup recalled. "Chances are you would mine everything but the place you use daily—that would be the last place to be sewed up. This conclusion was a very definite factor in our decision to land where we did." *Ibid.*

formed the northern leg of the triangle, but the western portion, made up of scattered islets and reefs, was for the most part open to the sea. Butaritari, some six miles in length, was the principal island in the atoll. Intelligence officers discovered that the western part of the narrow island was swampy and somewhat overgrown. Much of Butaritari, however, had been given over to the cultivation of coconut palms and of the native staple food, taro. (See Map 6.)

Photographs of Butaritari, best clue to Japanese strength, led planners to believe that only 500 to 800 troops were available for the defense of the island. This total included an infantry company, a battery of four heavy anti-aircraft guns, and two anti-aircraft machine gun batteries. Most of the enemy installations were located in the vicinity of Butaritari Village within an area bounded on east and west by antitank ditches.

Unlike the reef off Betio, the coral outcropping around Butaritari was not considered a particularly difficult obstacle. Along the lagoon shore and off the southern part of the west coast at the island, the reef was considered to be so close to the beaches or so flat that it could be crossed quickly. Even if the LCVs grounded at the edge of the reef, intelligence officers felt that the soldiers could wade ashore without difficulty.

Apamama, according to intelligence estimates, should cause its attackers no trouble at all. As late as 18 October, the atoll was not occupied by any organized defensive force. The only emplacement that photo interpreters could locate was for a single

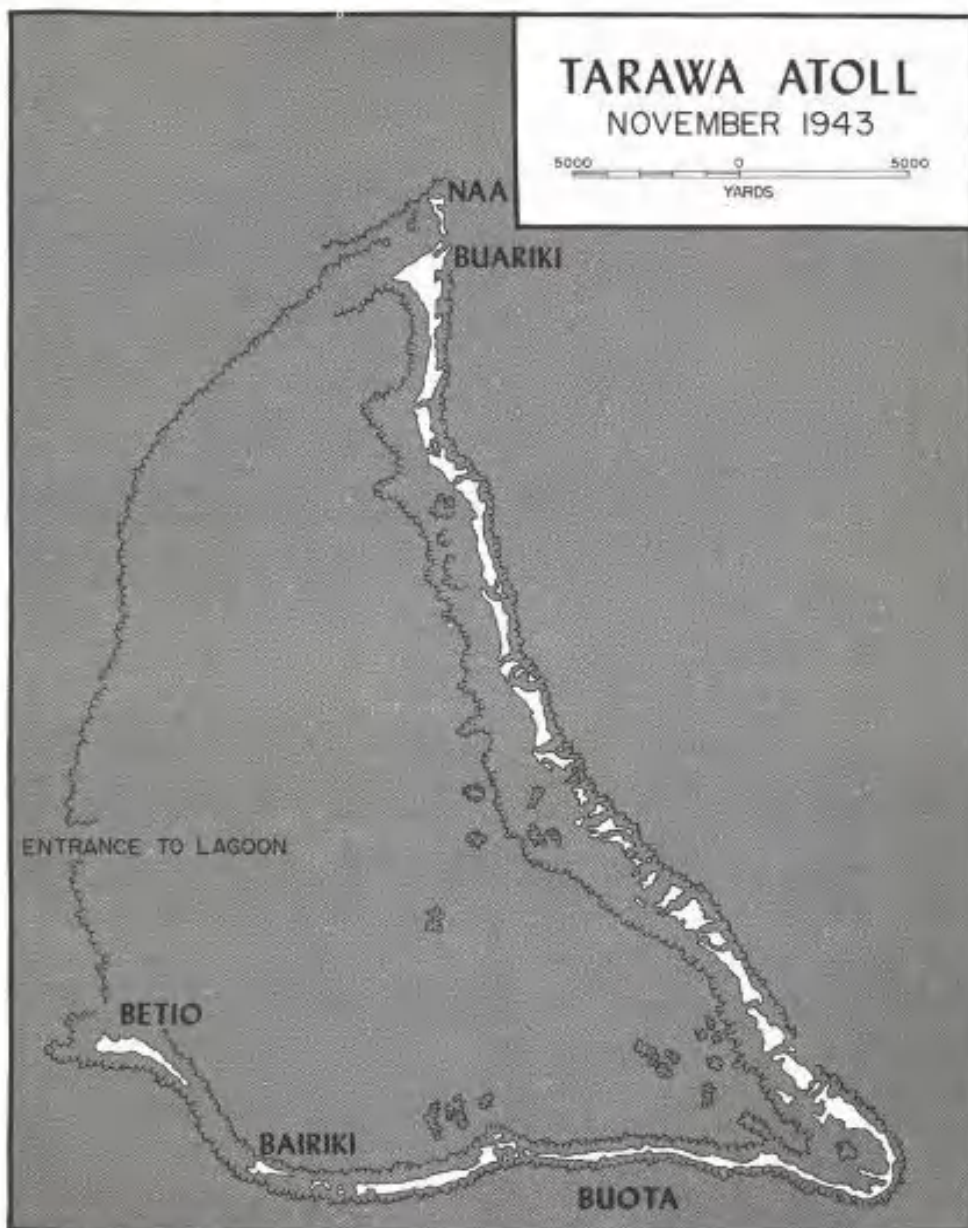
pedestal-mounted 5-inch naval gun, a weapon that appeared to have been abandoned. It was thought possible, however, that several coastwatchers might lurk among the islands that formed the atoll.¹⁸ (See Map 5.)

TASK ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND STRUCTURE

The basic organization for GALVANIC was established by Operation Plan 1-43, issued by Admiral Spruance on 25 October. The task organization consisted of three major groups: Rear Admiral Charles A. Pownall's Carrier Task Force (TF 50), Admiral Turner's Assault Force (TF 54), and Defense Forces and Land-based Air (TF 57) commanded by Rear Admiral John H. Hoover. The Assault Force was divided into two attack forces. One of these, the Northern Attack Force (TF 52) remained under Turner's command and was assigned to capture Makin. The other, Southern Attack Force (TF 53) under Admiral Hill, was to seize Tarawa and Apamama.

Admiral Pownall's TF 50 was to play an important part in the forthcoming operation. In addition to establishing and maintaining aerial superiority in the area, the carrier pilots were to aid the amphibious assault by neutralizing Japanese defenses, helping to spot the fall of supporting naval gunfire, and flying observation missions over Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama. They also had the mission of searching ahead of the convoys, providing fighter cover for

¹⁸ 2d MarDiv OPlan No. 1, dtd 30Oct43.



MAP 2

R. F. STIBIL

the operation, and guarding against submarine attack.

The land-based planes of TF 57 were to help gain mastery of the skies over the Gilberts. Flying from airstrips on Baker Island and in the Ellice, Phoenix, and Samoan groups, Admiral Hoover's aircraft, including the planes of the Seventh Air Force, were to blast those bases from which the enemy might interfere with GALVANIC. In addition, this force was to bomb the assault objectives and conduct long-range searches.

Before preparing the command relationships paragraph of Admiral Spruance's operation order, his chief of staff, Captain Charles J. Moore, had long discussions with the commanders involved. Continual revisions were made to clarify Holland Smith's position and to satisfy him regarding the role of the landing force commanders at Tarawa and Makin. At each objective, Julian Smith and Ralph Smith were to take independent command of their own forces, once they were established ashore, but "their gunfire support and logistic support and they, themselves, remained under the command of their respective Assault Task Commanders."¹⁹ In the case of Holland Smith as a tactical corps commander, the naval leaders considered—although the Marine general disagreed—that he had no function in directing the operations of the two independent commanders ashore at Betio and Makin. He could do nothing without the functioning of the Task Force

Commander who controlled the ships."²⁰

General Holland Smith was to sail in the Assault Force flagship and command the landing force; however, Admiral Spruance made directives issued by the general subject to the approval of Admiral Turner, since the employment of troops was governed by "the capabilities of the surface units to land and support them."²¹ The operation plan issued by Turner followed this definition of Holland Smith's duties. The general was to advise the Assault Force commander on the employment of the landing force and the use of reserves, but at both Makin and Tarawa the Attack Force commanders would exercise authority through the commanders ashore. Although Spruance directed that the assault troops would be free of naval control after the beachhead had been secured, his command alignment did not follow the theories advanced by the Marines who had fought at Guadalcanal. Unquestionably, the Central Pacific commander determined that GALVANIC, with two widely separated landings either of which might attract the Japanese battle fleet, was an operation which required naval control throughout all its stages.²²

As he had done concerning his role in planning, Holland Smith protested his tactical command position to Spruance. The naval officer replied that VAC retained operational control over three garrison units: the 2d and 8th Marine Defense Battalions and the 7th Army

¹⁹ *Moore Comments.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *ComCenPacFor OPlan 1-43*, p. 11.

²² *Moore Comments.*

Defense Battalion; overall command of assault troops would be exercised by Turner through Holland Smith. "It is considered essential," Spruance continued, "that the responsibility for the assault be placed on the Commander Fifth Amphibious Force. He will require the benefit of your knowledge of amphibious training and operations to ensure the success of the operation with the minimum losses to the troops engaged."²³ In response to a query from General Richardson, who received a copy of this letter, as to whether Admiral Turner or General Holland Smith was the "immediate superior combat commander" of Army troops engaged in GALVANIC, Admiral Nimitz replied that the "immediate superior combat commander of the Commanding General, 27th Infantry Division (Army), is the Commanding General, 5th Amphibious Corps, Major General Holland Smith, USMC."²⁴

THE SCHEME OF ATTACK

The overall plan for GALVANIC called for the 2d Marine Division (less one regiment in corps reserve) to storm Tarawa, while the 165th Infantry of the 27th Division took Makin. Elements of the Marine reserve regiment

could be employed at either objective, depending upon the enemy's reaction, or used to occupy Apamama. When and where the reserve would be committed was a decision that Admiral Turner alone would make. The force commander, however, might rely upon the advice of Holland Smith.

At both Makin and Tarawa, it was planned that the first few waves would churn ashore in amphibian tractors, vehicles that had been ferried to the objective in tank landing ships (LSTs). Off the atolls, the landing ships would stop, open the huge doors in their bows and disgorge the tractors down a lowered ramp into the water. Since the assault troops would be in transports, it was necessary that they first climb down heavy nets to enter LCVPs from which they later would transfer to LVTs. The tractors would then maneuver to form waves, each one destined for a particular beach. Plans called for minesweepers to sweep the lagoon entrance, anchor buoys to mark the cleared channel, and take position at the line of departure. At this line, the waves were to be guided into lanes leading directly to the assigned beach and at a given signal sent racing across the line toward the island.

The procedure planned for later waves was slightly different, for LVTs had been reserved for the leading assault elements. Since no transfer was necessary, the same LCVPs in which the infantrymen and artillerymen left their transports would carry them to the rendezvous area for the formation of assault waves, to the line of departure where the shoreward movement would be coordinated, and finally to the embattled beachhead. Two Landing

²³ ComdrCenPacFor ltr to CG, VAC, ser 0081, dtd 14Oct43 (S-1 File, Comd Relationships, HistBr, HQMC).

²⁴ CinCPOA ltr to CGAFPOA, ser 00249, dtd 25Oct43 (OAB, NHD). General Richardson's request for clarification of the tactical command structure was made to insure that it was in accord with Army doctrine and that the corps commander would be the superior officer from whom the 27th Division commander received his combat orders. CGAFPOA ltr to CinCPOA, dtd 17Oct43 (OAB, NHD).

Ships, Dock (LSDs), the USS *Ashland* and *Belle Grove*, had been assigned to carry the medium tanks for Operation GALVANIC. These ships would perform basically the same service for the Landing Craft, Medium (LCMs) and the tanks they carried that the smaller LSTs did for the amphibian tractors. The holds of the LSDs would be flooded to enable the landing craft to float through an opening in the stern. Once afloat, the LCMs would head for the rendezvous area for assignment to the proper boat wave, the first leg in their journey into battle.

D-Day at both objectives was to be ushered in with an aerial attack. From 0545 to 0615 carrier planes would bomb and strafe enemy troops and installations. After the aviators had completed their final runs, the fire support ships would begin a 2½-hour hammering of the objectives. Scheduled to blast Butaritari Island at Makin were four old battleships, four cruisers, and six destroyers. Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, was destined to shudder under the weight of high explosives thrown into it by three battleships, five cruisers, and nine destroyers. Never before had such powerful sea-borne batteries been massed against such small targets. The result, naval gunfire planners optimistically hoped, would be devastating, although few experienced officers looked for total destruction of the enemy defenses.²⁵

²⁵ The commanding officer of the transport group which landed the Marines at Tarawa, recalled stating his doubts of the efficacy of this fire "very forcibly during a conference at Wellington, N.Z. I had witnessed a similar bombing and bombardment of Gavutu Island, in the Solomons, where I landed a Marine

When the naval guns had ceased their thundering, the carrier planes would return for a five-minute attack on the invasion beaches as the assault waves were moving ashore.

Naval gunfire, to be delivered on D-Day and after, was scheduled for both objectives. When the ships opened fire depended upon the enemy's reaction, for any Japanese batteries that threatened the unloading would have to be silenced. Preparatory fires on D-Day, divided into two phases, were to begin after the first air strike. First, the support ships would deliver 75 minutes of pre-arranged neutralization and counterbattery fire, if necessary closing the range to as little as 2,000 yards in order to knock out protected coastal defense guns. The second phase, to last for 45 minutes, called for an increasingly heavy bombardment of assigned areas with the combined purposes of destroying emplacements along the invasion beaches and neutralizing enemy defenses throughout the islands. At Tarawa, the support ships were positioned to fire from the west across Betio, since fire from the south might cause ricochetting shells that could fall into troop assembly areas on the lagoon side of the island.²⁶ Once the assault troops were ashore, certain warships could be called upon to blast specific targets that impeded the American ad-

Paratroop outfit. From daylight to noon this little island was subjected to repeated bombing attacks and bombardment by cruisers and destroyers. The results had been most disappointing." RAdm Herbert B. Knowles ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 1Sep62, hereafter Knowles ltr.

²⁶ Hill interview/comments.

vance. During the preparatory shelling, however, all ships were to fire for the most part into areas rather than at selected strongpoints.

Target destruction fires were to be delivered simultaneously with the neutralization of the remainder of the area in which the target was located. The idea of combining neutralization with destruction did not appeal to the 2d Marine Division staff, but naval planners were determined to rain down explosives on the whole of Betio in order to devastate the island in the shortest possible time. The final approved naval gunfire support plan was an amalgam of the desires of the naval and landing force commanders. In commenting on the planning period, General Julian Smith recalled:

We Marines, all of whom had studied, and in some cases seen in actual combat, the effect of land artillery fire, ships' gunfire, and aerial bombardment, found naval officers unduly optimistic as to the results to be obtained from the bombardment, but never any lack of willingness on their part to listen to our problems and to cooperate most fully in assisting in their solution.²⁷

The plan prepared by the 2d Marine Division had its origin early in August, when Admiral Spruance visited General Julian Smith's headquarters at Wellington, New Zealand. At this time the admiral verbally assigned the capture of Tarawa Atoll to the division. During the conference, the problem of the

reef at Betio was discussed, and division planners made a tentative decision to land the first three waves in amphibian tractors. The final judgment would depend upon the results of tests of the ability of LVTs to clamber over coral ledges.

Following these talks, the division received its first written directives, documents based on the original Gilberts-Nauru concept. Since the Marines' objectives were Tarawa and Apamama, the later substitution of Makin for Nauru did not disrupt staff planning.

The 2d Marine Division was attached to VAC on 15 September, and on 2 October, Julian Smith and members of his staff flew to Pearl Harbor to coordinate plans with Holland Smith, Turner, and Hill. During the time between his conversations with Spruance and his trip to Pearl Harbor, Julian Smith had been devising a plan for the conquest of Betio. A striking feature of this tentative scheme was the landing of artillery on an island adjacent to Betio prior to the main assault. At Pearl Harbor, Julian Smith learned that the enemy was considered capable of launching a combined air and submarine attack within three days after the American ships arrived off the atoll. Landing howitzers in anticipation of the assault on Betio would forewarn the Japanese, and the enemy might be able to catch the transports before these vessels could be unloaded. Another unpleasant fact that came to light at this time was the decision to hold one regiment of Julian Smith's command in corps reserve. The 2d Marine Division would lack even the strength to make simultaneous assaults against Betio and a secondary objective which

²⁷ LtGen Julian C. Smith, "Tarawa," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 79, no. 11 (Nov 53), p. 1170, hereafter Smith, "Tarawa"; VAC NGF Spt Plan, dtd 13Oct43, Anx B to VAC OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43; TF 53 NGF Spt n.d., Encl A to TF 53 Rpt of Tarawa Ops, dtd 13Dec43, hereafter *TF 53 AR*.

might serve as the site for artillery. One alternative remained—a direct frontal attack without the prelanding support of division artillery.

Aware that an assault of the type confronting him was the most costly of operations, Julian Smith asked for definite orders. “I discussed the matter fully with the Corps commander,” he later recalled, “and when informed that the decision to make the attack directly on Betio was final and must be accomplished by the Second Marine Division less the combat team assigned to Corps reserve, I requested that my orders be so worded as I did not feel that the plan should be my responsibility.”²⁸ Orders were promptly issued by VAC to seize Betio before occupying any of the remaining islands in the atoll.

After the approval of the 2d Division plan, Julian Smith and his party returned to New Zealand. On 19 October, Admiral Hill and key members of his staff followed to go over last-minute details before the issuance of the final plans. Hill brought with him a rough draft of Admiral Spruance’s communications plan, whose final version was not available to Task Force 53 until three weeks later, just an hour before the ships left their staging area for the target. When he reached New Zealand, Hill got his first look at his flagship, the USS *Maryland*. The battleship still had 20 yard workmen on board making the necessary alterations for its role as command center for the Tarawa operation.²⁹

²⁸ Smith, “Tarawa,” p. 1167; LtGen Julian C. Smith ltr to ACoFS, G-3, HQMC, hereafter *Julian Smith ltr*.

²⁹ *Hill interview/comments*.

The 2d Marine Division operations order, completed on 25 October, called for Combat Team 2 (2d Marines, reinforced, with 2/8 attached) to make the assault landings. The remaining two battalions of the 8th Marines, along with the regimental headquarters, were held in division reserve, while the 6th Marines remained under corps control. Elements of the 10th Marines, division artillery, a part of Combat Team 2, would be landed as quickly as possible to support operations ashore. From the 18th Marines, Julian Smith’s engineers, came another part of the combat team, demolitions and flamethrower men to assist the infantry battalions, as well as the shore party that had the task of speeding supplies to the front lines.

Combat Team 2 planned to assault Beaches Red 1, Red 2, and Red 3, all on the lagoon side of the island and each the objective of one battalion landing team. As a result of the removal of one regiment from Julian Smith’s control, the 2d Marine Division had only an estimated two-to-one numerical edge in infantry over the defending Japanese. Instead of reinforcements, Combat Team 2 would have to rely on the effect of the massive preliminary bombardment in its effort to drive completely across the island, capture the airfield, change direction, and launch a two-battalion thrust down the long axis of the objective. (See Map III, Map Section.)

Minor adjustments had to be made throughout the planning phase. Experiments proved that amphibian tractors could crawl across a coral reef, but these vehicles were in short supply. The 2d Division had 100 tractors, all of

them primitive LVT(1)s which had been designed primarily as cargo carriers and lacked armor protection. Julian Smith's staff obtained sheets of light armor which were fixed to the tractors while the division was in New Zealand. Many of these LVTs, veterans of the Guadalcanal fighting, had outlived their usefulness, but mechanics managed to breathe new life into 75 of them. Each LVT(1) had room for 20 fully equipped men in addition to its crew of 3. Unless the division commander received more LVTs, he did not have enough vehicles for the first three assault waves.³⁰

The nearest source of additional tractors was San Diego. Although there was neither time nor shipping to get large numbers of these vehicles to New Zealand, 50 LVT(2)s were shipped to Samoa. Members of the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion went to that island to form a new company which would join the division off Tarawa. The new LVT(2) was an improved version of the tractor already in use by the division. Horsepower had been boosted from 146 to 200, a change which enabled the LVT(2) to move slightly faster while carrying 4 more men or 1,500 more pounds of cargo than its predecessor. Also, the new model could cruise for 75 miles in the water, compared to 50 miles for the LVT(1). Tests were ordered in which the new tractors ran 4,000 yards with a full battle load to determine the time it would take the LVT(2), which proved

capable of making at least four miles an hour.³¹ Each LVT (2) was equipped with portable armor plate for the front, sides, and cab. These plates could be used during assault landings or removed if there was no danger of enemy fire.

Another proposed refinement in the basic plan was a request for additional aerial bombardment. Lieutenant Colonel David M. Shoup, division operations officer, urged that Seventh Air Force planes drop one-ton "daisy-cutters" on and beyond the invasion beaches during the ship-to-shore movement. In addition to killing Japanese, the heavy bombs would shatter buildings that otherwise might provide cover for enemy snipers. This request, although endorsed by the division and listed in the air operations plan, was not carried out.³² The approach plan prepared by Task Force 53 called for certain of the fire support ships to separate from the main group as the transports neared the transport area. These warships would steam to designated positions to the south, west, and northwest of Betio. Two minesweepers were to lead the destroyer screen into the lagoon. Next to pass through the gap in the barrier reef would be an LSD carrying the medium

³¹ *Hill interview/comments.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1166. For details concerning various models of the LVT, see ONI, ND, *Supplement No. 1 to ONI 226, Allied Landing Craft and Ships* (Washington, 1945).

³² *Ibid.* General Shoup was later told that three B-24s with these bombs on board actually took off, but that one crashed on takeoff, one flew into the water, and the third did not reach its destination. *Shoup interview/comments.* A search of Seventh Air Force records in the USAF Historical Archives failed to reveal any mention of this request. Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF Historian, ltr to Head, Hist Br, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Aug62.

tanks of the division and finally the initial waves of landing craft.

Planning for the employment of the 27th Infantry Division was handicapped by the substitution of Makin Atoll for Nauru Island. In addition, there was a difference of opinion between General Ralph Smith, the division commander, and General Holland Smith of VAC. The corps commander preferred to assault Butaritari from the lagoon side, bringing the maximum strength to bear against a small portion of the coast. On the other hand, the Army general wanted to land two battalions on the west coast of the island and two hours later send a single battalion ashore near the waist of objective. This second blow would be delivered from the lagoon. Ralph Smith's views prevailed, and the Marine general gave rather reluctant approval to the scheme.

Assigned to the Makin operation was the 165th Regimental Combat Team (RCT). With a total of 6,470 men, this heavily reinforced unit outnumbered the estimated defenders of Butaritari by roughly 8-to-1. Three reinforced companies from the 105th Infantry, 582 officers and men in all, had been assigned to the landing force. One of these companies would, if LVTs became available, spearhead each of the assault battalions. This mixing of units was brought about by the shortage of amphibian tractors. Since it seemed for a time that none of these vehicles would be available, Ralph Smith scheduled all assault elements of the 165th Infantry to train with and land from LCVPs, while reserving the tractors for the men of the 105th. Thus, there would be no need to adjust his plans if the

promised tractors did not arrive, for the men from the 105th could remain in reserve. On the other hand, if the LVTs did appear, they could be used by the detachments from the 105th Infantry, and again no violence would be done to the basic landing plan.

In Ralph Smith's opinion, the rapid capture of the tank barrier guarding the western limits of the main defenses was of the greatest importance. It was to gain this end that he had proposed two separate landings followed by a pincers movement against the enemy stronghold. Such a maneuver, however, would depend on close coordination between the attacking units and reliable communications with the artillery batteries that had landed over the western beaches. Another solution to the problem posed by the tank barrier would have been to rake the obstacle with naval gunfire. At the time, however, neither Ralph Smith nor his staff were impressed with the effectiveness of seaborne artillery. Instead of seeking aid from sharpshooting destroyers, they preferred a combination of land weapons—infantry, artillery, and armor.

COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPLY ³³

In general, the overall communica-

³³ Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac Comm Plan, n.d., Anx A to CinCPac OPlan 1-43, dtd 5Oct43; Rpt of GALVANIC Comm, dtd 4Dec43, Encl D to *V PhibFor AR*; TransArea Debarkation and Unloading Plan, n.d., and Unloading and Beach Pty Plan, n.d., Apps 1 and 2 to Anx D to *TF 53 OpO A101-43*; SigRpt, dtd 4Dec43 with Suppl, dtd 3Jan 44, and TQM Report, dtd 30Dec43, Encl F to *VAC AR*.



BETIO ISLAND as it appeared two weeks after the battle, looking west over GREEN Beach. (USAF B-65141AC)



ASSAULT TROOPS cross the log wall behind the RED Beaches and move inland on Betio. (USMC 64032)

tions plan for GALVANIC was considered adequate, even though it could have been improved. Principal objections to the communications annex issued by Spruance's headquarters were twofold: it was too long, 214 mimeographed pages, and it should have been distributed sooner. The second criticism was justified, but the staff had worked against an impossible deadline; those who objected to the bulk of the document would later admit that an overall plan, huge though it might be, was preferable to several briefer, less detailed, and possibly conflicting plans.

Secrecy was the watchword during the preparation for GALVANIC, and this mood of caution was to prevail during the approach of the expeditionary force. Since strict radio silence was necessary, only VHF (Very High Frequency) and TBS (Talk Between Ships) equipment could be used within the convoys. Visual signals were substituted whenever possible for routine radio messages, but signalmen proved rusty at first. Although speed came with practice, the vast number of visual signals, which reached as many as 80 per day off Tarawa, led to the establishment, en route to the target, of areas of operational responsibility within the task force. Had this practice not been adopted, hours would have been lost in passing messages from ship to ship to insure that every element of the force had got the information. As it was, certain vessels were to pass on information to ships within specified sectors.

Keeping contact between ships and shore was certain to be the most difficult aspect of the GALVANIC communications problem. Neither LSTs,

transports, nor the beachmasters were equipped with the SCR-610 radio, and this set turned out to be the best piece of signal equipment ashore on Betio.³⁴ During the first crucial days, these sets would often provide the only means of radio contact between the beach and the task force. The Marines themselves were saddled with the TBX and TBY, two low power sets whose general worthlessness brought the postoperation comment that: "light weight but powerful and rugged portable equipment having full frequency range and capable of sustained operation does not appear available in any standard type."³⁵ The TBX lacked the necessary range, and the TBY was not sufficiently waterproof.

Both the Marines and soldiers had wire equipment with which to establish communications within the beach-head area. Unfortunately, the generator armature of the standard EE-8 field telephone and the drop coil of its companion switchboard were not waterproof and therefore unreliable in amphibious operations. Also, to avoid damage by troops and tracked vehicles as well as short circuits caused by dampness, it was desirable to string telephone wires above the ground, something that could not easily be done in the face of enemy fire.

³⁴ "The SCR-610 and the ship-carried SCR-608 were Army radios 'appropriated' by the Navy transports that served in the Aleutians and were now to take part in GALVANIC. We had to dole them out where most needed and never had anywhere near enough of them during the GALVANIC Operation." *Knowles ltr.*

³⁵ V PhibFor Rpt of GALVANIC Comm, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

GALVANIC could not succeed unless a steady current of supplies was kept moving from the holds of the transports to the front lines. First step in this process was the rapid unloading of cargo, and to gain speed both the Army and Marine divisions combat loaded their shipping. Cargo was so stowed that items needed early in the fighting were at the top of the holds and close to the hatches. Because vessels were dispatched to the 2d Marine Division piecemeal, as quickly as they were released from other duties, the division staff could not predict how much cargo space would be available. Sometimes the blueprints provided by the arriving ships were outdated and no help to the hard-pressed planners. The Marines, nevertheless, managed to do a creditable job; in fact, the only snag in unloading came as a result of the re-arranging of cargo in ships at anchor off Tarawa.

The vessels carrying the 27th Infantry Division troops also were effectively combat loaded. Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Ferris, division G-4, organized a transport quartermaster school and sent his students to Pearl Harbor to learn the characteristics of naval transports as well as loading techniques. In addition, the supply section of the Army division resurrected the stowage plans drawn up for the Attu operation, studied them, and used them as guides for plans of their own.

In handling cargo, the Army division had a decided advantage over its Marine counterpart. While the 27th Infantry Division had some 1,800 sled and toboggan type pallets, the 2d Marine Division had almost none, a deficiency caused when the necessary

materials to build them failed to reach Wellington in time. Pallets meant easier handling of cargo because several heavy boxes could be lashed to a wooden platform, stowed and unloaded as a single unit, and hauled intact to the using unit.

At Makin, the scheme of maneuver and the relatively small Japanese garrison indicated that cargo could be ferried to the beach without serious enemy interference. Sailors and a part of a company from the 105th Infantry were to act as ship unloading details. On the beachhead, the 102d Engineer Battalion, reinforced by small detachments from the 165th Infantry, would provide shore parties to sort supplies and rush them inland. One engineer company was attached for this purpose to each assault battalion.³⁶

Tarawa, however, offered a far greater logistical challenge. The assault waves were to slam directly into the enemy's defenses on Betio, and the craft carrying supplies for the 2d Marine Division also might encounter fierce opposition. Landing craft were certain to be sunk, so extra service would be required of the survivors. Every man was expected to do his duty and more. "Use your brains . . . and guts," urged Captain Herbert B. Knowles, transport group commander; "keep the boats moving, and get the stuff to the Marines."³⁷

As soon as the assault waves had hit the beach and landing craft became

³⁶ SP Ops, Anx 4 to 27th InfDiv AdminO 11, dtd 26Oct43; see also Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 48-49, 102.

³⁷ TF 53 Unloading and Beach Pty Plan, *op. cit.*

available, Marines and sailors would begin unloading cargo from the transports. Supplies were to be loaded into the boats according to a fixed priority, but dispatchers would not send the boats shoreward unless told to do so by the commander of the regiment for whom the cargo was destined. En route to the beach, all supply craft had to report to control officers who made sure that the incoming boats were headed toward the proper sector and that a shore party was on hand to unload them. LVTs, LCVPs, and LCMs all might haul supplies, but the last, with its 30-ton capacity, was considered most valuable.

An orderly logistical effort also required that beach party and shore party units land with the assault battalions. In charge of each beach party was a naval officer, the beachmaster, who assisted the shore party commander, and also supervised marking the beaches, evacuating the wounded, and the other tasks performed by his men. A Marine officer commanded the shore party, which was primarily concerned with unloading the incoming boats, sorting supplies, and storing them or moving them inland. At Betio some of these activities could be concentrated at the long pier near the waist of the island. This structure was accessible to landing craft, for its jutted beyond the reef, and a boat channel had been dredged along its western side.

Since protracted fighting was expected at neither Makin nor Tarawa, both divisions limited the amount of supplies to be carried to the target area. The transports assigned the 165th RCT carried the assault troops,

their equipment and weapons, 5 units of fire per weapon, plus 10 days' rations, 2 days' K rations, and such miscellaneous items as medical supplies, ordnance spare parts and cleaning equipment, and fuel enough to last the vehicles on board for 7 days. Stowed in the assault cargo ship assigned to the Makin landing force were 24 days' B rations for the entire command, 15,000 gallons of water, 8 days' motor fuel, and additional ammunition. Three LSTs carried still other supplies.

The 2d Marine Division also attempted to keep a tight rein on its supplies. To be embarked with the convoy carrying the assault and garrison forces were 30 days' B rations, 5 days' C or K rations (later changed to 3 days' K and 10 days' C), 2 days' D rations, and enough water to provide 2 gallons per day to each member of the command for a period of 5 days.³⁸ Within five days, water distillation equipment would be operating. Enough maintenance supplies, fuels, and lubricants to last 30 days were loaded in the transports. Also on hand were construction, medical, and aviation supplies for 30 days. Although antiaircraft weapons were allotted 10 units of fire, coast defense guns and all other weapons received 5.

³⁸ The usual components of standard rations were: D, an emergency individual ration—a special chocolate bar; C, the individual combat ration—canned hash, stew, or meat and beans, biscuits, sugar, powdered coffee, and candy; K, another emergency or combat ration—breakfast, dinner, and supper units, each consisting of tinned luncheon meat, biscuits, sugar, and gum; B, a rear-area unit ration—canned meats, dried or canned fruit and vegetables, canned bread, or biscuits.

The number of vehicles was to have been reduced to the minimum necessary for operations on an island the size of Betio, but as planning progressed the number of trucks, tanks, half-tracks, LVTs, and trailers thought vital for the attack continued to increase. Eventually, the Marines lifted to the target more vehicles than they could use. The final total, including LVTs, for the assault echelon was 732 wheeled and tracked vehicles plus 205 trailers. The Makin landing force made a similar miscalculation, bringing with it 372 tracked or wheeled vehicles, and 39 trailers.³⁹

TRAINING AND PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS

Upon assuming command of the 2d Marine Division on 1 May 1943, Julian Smith inherited a veteran unit but one that still was suffering the effects of the Guadalcanal fighting. The division had arrived in New Zealand with 12,500 diagnosed cases of malaria, many of whom eventually were evacuated to the United States. So serious was the health problem that as late as 10 October malaria victims were being admitted to the hospital at the rate of 40 per day. Even as the new commanding general was taking charge, the first replacements began arriving. More would follow until the organization reached combat strength. Fitting these men into the division team was one of the problems facing the new commander and his staff.

³⁹ Details of Loading of GALVANIC Ship, Encl 1 to V PhibFor AR; VAC AdminO 4-43, dtd 13Oct43; 2d MarDiv OpO No. 14.

In addition to shattering the health of the division, the Guadalcanal campaign weakened it in a tactical sense. At Guadalcanal, the 2d Marine Division had fought for the most part as a collection of combat teams rather than as a tightly organized unit. The lessons of jungle warfare had to be put aside, and the various elements of the command welded into an effective and well-coordinated striking force capable of seizing a defended atoll.⁴⁰

Late in September, as transports became available, the transition from jungle fighters to amphibious assault troops began in earnest. First the battalion landing teams, then the regiments practiced off Paekakariki, at Hawke Bay, and in Wellington Harbor, while a few LVTs were sent to the Fijis to test their ability against reefs similar to those that guarded Betio. After these preliminary landings, the Marines returned to camp to rest, repair equipment, and prepare for what they thought was going to be a full-scale division exercise.⁴¹

During this period, the same few ships did most of the work with the Marines, since new arrivals destined for the transport group of the Southern Attack Force needed "to have engineering work done, boats from the scrapped boat pool ashore overhauled and supplied them, and some semblance of communications equipment furnished."⁴² The group commander, Captain Knowles, commented:

Most of these ships arrived lacking full crews, full boat complements and woefully

⁴⁰ Smith, "Tarawa," pp. 1165-1166.

⁴¹ Shoup interview/comments.

⁴² Knowles ltr.

lacking in communications facilities. Some of these ships had been diverted to Wellington while still on 'shakedown' operations. The transport group commander did not know that he was destined for anything except conduct of amphibious training with 2nd Mar. Div. until about the middle of the month; then he had to organize 3 divisions of transports and get them ready for sea by 1 November. His flagship *Monrovia* had been stripped of everything useful in the way of communication facilities except basic commercial ship radios. At Efate we had to install a small command station above the ship's bridge plus sufficient signal yards and signal flags to do the job ahead. Had we not had extra naval personnel and Army SCRs (both 'appropriated' at the end of the Aleutian Operation) we would have been in an even sorrier mess than we were. The few ships that had been in the Aleutians furnished officers and men to give at least a minimum of [experienced] personnel to new arrivals.⁴³

Marine Division had a strong leavening of combat experienced men spread throughout its units. These veterans gave emphasis to the constant theme in training—keep the attack moving. Should officers fall or units become disorganized, noncommissioned officers would have to assume command, and this would often happen at Betio. Also emphasized were local security and fire discipline during the night, tactics that would forestall Japanese infiltration and local counterattacks. One criticism of the division training program was its failure to spend enough time drilling infantrymen, tank crews, and demolitions men to act as integrated teams in reducing strongpoints. At the time no one realized the tenacity with which the enemy

would fight even after the island seemed doomed to fall.⁴⁴

The 27th Infantry Division, untried in combat, was also new to the techniques of amphibious warfare. Preparing this division for Operation GALVANIC was a task shared between General Richardson's headquarters and Holland Smith's VAC. The Army command handled training for ground combat as well as certain phases of pre-amphibious training, while the Marine headquarters concentrated on the ship-to-shore movement. Logistical planning and routine administration for Army troops also lay within the province of General Richardson.

In actual practice, the distinction between ground, pre-amphibious, and amphibious matters tended to disappear. The 27th Infantry Division was first introduced to amphibious warfare in December 1942, when two officers from the unit attended a school offered at San Diego by Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. The information gained at San Diego was passed on to other division officers in a school conducted in Hawaii. After the division had been selected to provide troops for GALVANIC, the tempo of training increased, and those portions of amphibious training which could be carried out ashore were undertaken at Army installations. In addition, the division began organizing liaison parties to direct naval gunfire and drilling its supply personnel in the complexities of combat loading. Ship-to-shore exercises, however, awaited

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1168; Maj Arthur J. Rauchle ltr to CMC, dtd 12Jun47; 2d MarDiv, 3/2, and 3/6 WarDs, Oct-Nov43 (Unit Rpt File, Hist Br, HQMC); Johnston, *Follow Me!*, pp. 94-95.

Admiral Turner's ships and General Holland Smith's instructors.

While the training of Army troops for GALVANIC was getting underway, VAC found itself preoccupied with two demanding tasks, organization of the corps itself and planning for the scheduled operation. In the meantime, General Richardson went ahead with his training program, absorbing the necessary amphibious doctrine from War Department manuals, Navy and Marine Corps publications, and the recorded experience of other Army divisions. Of particular value were notes prepared by the 9th Infantry Division during its indoctrination under Holland Smith as well as the original loading plans for the Attu landing. By the time that VAC began to assert itself in the training setup, Richardson had come to look upon the Marine organization as simply another echelon to clutter up the chain of command. The Army general believed that Admiral Turner, who controlled the necessary ships, was the logical person to train troops for the ship-to-shore movement, and felt that there was no need at the time for a corps of any sort.⁴⁵

Thus, on the eve of GALVANIC both Richardson and Holland Smith were complaining about the status of VAC. The Marine general objected because his headquarters had been restricted in its exercise of tactical command, and the Army general urged that the corps be abolished completely. Their respective higher headquarters gave each

essentially the same advice: to make the best of the situation. This they did, and preparations for combat continued.⁴⁶

Training of the 27th Infantry Division came to a climax with a series of amphibious exercises held in the Hawaiian Islands. Bad weather and poor beaches hampered the earlier efforts, and the rehearsals were of questionable value. During the first two rehearsals, the troops landed, but no supplies were put ashore. Because of rock-strewn beaches, assault craft did not advance beyond the line of departure in the third or dress rehearsal. Preserving scarce LVTs from possible damage was judged more important than any lessons the troops might learn.

Preparations for the Gilberts invasion included certain preliminary combat operations, some remotely connected with GALVANIC, and others designed specifically to batter the assault objectives. American might first made itself felt in the Gilberts in February 1942 when carrier planes lashed at Makin Atoll. In August of the same year, Marine Raiders startled the Japanese by making a sudden descent on Butaritari Island. In April of the following year, after a series of reconnaissance flights, heavy bombers of the Seventh Air Force, operating from Funafuti and Canton Island, began harassing Nauru and targets in the Gilberts.

These early aerial efforts were sorely handicapped by the lack of bases close to the Gilberts. To remedy this situation, the 7th Marine Defense Battalion occupied Nanomea Atoll in the Ellice

⁴⁵ LtGen Robert C. Richardson, Jr., USA, ltr to LtGen Thomas T. Handy, USA, dtd 5 Nov 43 (OPD File 384 PTO-Sec II, RG 115, WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁴⁶ *Morton MS*, ch. 23, pp. 22-25.

Islands and the 2d Marine Airdrome Battalion established itself at Nukufetau in the same island group. Both landings were made during August 1943. A third air base was established in September at Baker Island, an American possession which had gone unoccupied since the coming of war. The last of these fields to be completed, that at Nukufetau, was ready on 9 October.

The Seventh Air Force began its systematic support of GALVANIC on 13 November by launching 18 Funafuti-based B-24s against Tarawa. On the following day, the hulking bombers divided their attention between Tarawa and Mille in the Marshalls. Gradually the list of targets was expanded to include Makin, Jaluit, Maloelap, and even Kwajalein. Between 13 and 17 November, planes of the Seventh Air Force dropped 173 tons of high explosives on various targets in the Gilberts and Marshalls and destroyed 5 enemy aircraft. Admiral Hoover's land-based naval planes and patrol bombers also began their offensive on 13 November, but limited themselves to night strikes against Nauru, Tarawa, and Makin. (See Map I, Map Section and Map 7.)

The Navy was far from reluctant to risk its carrier planes against Japan's island fortresses. In fact, Admiral Pownall's fast carriers went into action even before the Seventh Air Force had launched its intensive aerial campaign. On 17 and 18 September, planes from three aircraft carriers blasted Makin, Apamama, Tarawa, and Nauru. The naval aviators were assisted by B-24s from Guadalcanal, Canton Island, and Funafuti, aircraft which carried cam-

eras as well as bombs, and other Liberator bombers struck the Gilberts on the following day as the carriers were withdrawing. Next the carriers attacked Wake Island on 5 and 6 November.

The final phase of this campaign of preliminary aerial bombardment took place on 18 and 19 November. Seventh Air Force planes blasted Tarawa and Makin and helped carrier aircraft attack Nauru. After pounding Nauru, Admiral Pownall's fliers on 19 November dropped 130 tons of bombs on Jaluit and Mille. Air power had done its best to isolate the objectives and soften their defenses for the amphibious assault.⁴⁷

THE ENEMY ⁴⁸

Japan seized control of the Gilberts on 10 December 1941 in a move designed to gain bases from which to observe American activity in the South Pacific. Since the occupied islands were considered mere observation posts, little was done to fortify them. A handful of men were posted at

⁴⁷ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. 4, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950) pp. 290–302 hereafter Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; TF 50 AR GALVANIC, 10–27Nov43, dtd 4Jan44; CinCPac–CinCPOA WarD, Nov43, dtd 28Feb44 (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC).

⁴⁸ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA Buls 4–44, Study of Japanese Instls on Butaritari Island, Makin Atoll, dtd 14Jan 44, and 8–44, Japanese Fors in the Gilbert Islands, n.d (IntelFile, HistBr, HQMC); VAC G–2 Study and Rpt, Betio, dtd 23Dec43; 2d MarDiv and JICPOA Study of Japanese Def of Betio Island, Tarawa, dtd 20Dec43.

Tarawa, coastwatchers were scattered throughout the island group, and a seaplane base along with some rudimentary defenses were built on Makin. Apparently the Japanese became convinced that geography plus the battering given the American Fleet at Pearl Harbor had made the Gilberts invulnerable, for the small garrisons were shortly reduced. On 17 August 1942, when the hatches of two American submarines eased open and 221 Marines began paddling toward Butaritari Island, only 70 Japanese could be mustered to oppose them.⁴⁹

Although Japanese strategists dismissed the Makin raid as an attempt to pin down troops in the Central Pacific while new operations were launched to the southwest, the vulnerability of the Gilberts certainly shocked them. Unless these outlying islands were garrisoned in some strength, they would fall to the Americans and serve as bases for a thrust into the far more valuable Marshalls. Reinforcements were started toward the Gilberts, fortifications were thrown up throughout the group, and British citizens overlooked since the occupation were hunted down.

While the Gilberts were being reinforced, Japanese strategy was being revised. As early as March 1943, the Imperial Navy was thinking in terms of "interception operations," in which its ships would fall upon and annihilate any American fleet attempting to land troops along the fringes of Micronesia. Operations of this sort would be pos-

sible only if the defending garrison were strong enough to hold the attackers at bay until Japanese aircraft, submarines, and surface craft could reach the area.⁵⁰

In May 1943, Japanese naval leaders conferred at Truk, and out of these discussions evolved a plan to counter any American thrust into the Gilberts. Should Nimitz choose to attack, Japanese bombers from the Bismarcks would swoop down on his convoys, land at fields in the Gilberts and Marshalls, refuel, rearm, and return to action. Meanwhile, short-range planes were to be shuttled into the threatened area by way of Truk and other bases. Fleet units would steam eastward from Truk to cooperate with Bismarcks-based submarines in destroying the already battered invasion force.

This scheme for the defense of the Gilberts was but a single aspect of *Z Operation*, an overall plan of defense. This larger concept called for the establishment of an outer perimeter stretching from the Aleutians through the Marshalls and Gilberts to the Bismarcks. Vigorous action by the Imperial Fleet coupled with a stubborn fight by the island garrisons would thwart any American attempt to penetrate the barrier. The type of strategy espoused

⁴⁹ Chief, War Hist Off, Def Agency of Japan ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 19Nov62, hereafter *Japanese Gilberts comments*.

⁵⁰ Mil HistSec, Japanese Research Div, HQ, AFFE, Japanese Monographs No. 161, Inner South Seas Islands Area NavOps, Pt. 1: Gilbert Islands (Nov41–Nov43) and No. 173, Inner South Seas Area NavOps, Pt. 2: Marshall Islands (Dec41–Feb44); Takushiro Hattori, *Dai Toa Senso Zenshi* [*The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War*] (Tokyo: Masu Publishing Company, 1953—MS translation in 4 vols. at OCMH), II, pt. 5, p. 43, hereafter Hattori, *Complete History*.

in *Z Operation*, modified because of American successes in the Aleutians, was reviewed at an Imperial conference held during September 1943 and was considered acceptable.⁵¹

Betio Island, in keeping with defensive theory advanced as part of *Z Operation*, was heavily fortified. The basic defensive pattern selected for the island called for a series of strongpoints with the spaces between them covered by fire. American assault forces were to be cut down at the beach. Should the invaders manage to gain a foothold on the island, determined counterattacks would be launched to hurl them back into the sea.

In command at Tarawa was Rear Admiral Keiji Shibasaki of the *3d Special Base Force*. He had at his disposal 1,122 members of this force and 1,497 men of the *Sasebo 7th Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF)*. In addition to these combat troops, the admiral had a large contingent of laborers, 1,247 from the *111th Construction Unit* and 970 from the *4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment*. Since many of the laborers were Koreans and most were untrained, Shibasaki could rely on no more than about 3,000 effectives.

The defenses of Betio were cleverly integrated, with coast defense guns, automatic weapons, and various kinds of obstacles complementing one another. Upon approaching the island, the invader would have to brave the fire of 20 coastal defense guns, ranging in size from 80mm to 8-inch. Concrete tetrahedrons scattered along the reef would be encountered next; these

had been placed to force assault craft to follow routes swept by fire from the smaller coastal defense weapons, automatic cannon, and machine guns. To scourge the incoming waves, the Japanese on Betio had, in addition to the weapons already mentioned, 10 75mm mountain howitzers, 6 70mm guns, 9 37mm field pieces, at least 31 13mm machine guns, and an unknown number of 7.7mm machine guns.⁵² The defenders could also press into service dual-purpose antiaircraft weapons and the 37mm guns of seven light tanks. To make the firepower of this arsenal more effective, the Japanese strung double-apron barbed-wire fences between reef and beach and along the beaches themselves. (See Map II, Map Section.)

Admiral Shibasaki planned to destroy the enemy forces as they landed, but he did not overlook the possibility that the attackers might gain a lodgment on the island. A log fence just inland of the beaches, antitank ditches, and other obstacles were arranged to confine the assault force to a tiny strip of coral sand, where it could be wiped out.

If the ring of defenses along the shores of Betio could be penetrated, the attackers would find the inland defenses organized in a more haphazard fashion. The command posts, ammunition dumps, and communications centers were housed in massive bunkers of reinforced concrete, structures that were built to withstand even direct hits by high explosive naval shells or ae-

⁵¹ Hattori, *Complete History*, III, p. 4-5.

⁵² So great was the destruction on the island that a postoperation count of light machine guns was impossible.

rial bombs. These positions, however, were not designed primarily for defensive fighting. Although some fitted into patterns of mutual defense, most of them had blind spots, not covered by fire, from which flamethrower or demolition teams could close for the kill.

Far less formidable were the defenses of Butaritari Island. There Lieutenant Junior Grade Seizo Ishikawa commanded no more than 384 combat troops, 100 of them marooned aviation personnel and the remainder members of his *3rd Special Base Force Makin Detachment*. Also present, but of doubtful effectiveness, were 138 men of the *111th Construction Unit* and 276 from the *4th Fleet Construction Department Detachment*.

Japanese defenses on Butaritari were concentrated around King's Wharf, about one-third of the way down the lagoon side of the island from its western foot. At the base of the wharf, the Japanese had built their seaplane base. The perimeter was bounded on the southwest by an antitank ditch linked to an earthen barricade. This obstacle, about 2,000 yards from King's Wharf, stretched almost across the island but was defended by only one antitank gun, a single pillbox, six machine gun emplacements, and numerous rifle pits. A similar ditch-and-barricade combination was located about the same distance from King's in the opposite direction and marked the northeastern limits of the main defenses. Six machine guns, three pillboxes, and a string of rifle pits guarded this barrier. Throughout the principal defensive area, the majority of heavy weapons pointed seaward, so the greatest threat to an assault from the lagoon

lay in the trio of 80mm guns emplaced at the base of King's Wharf. (See Map 6.)

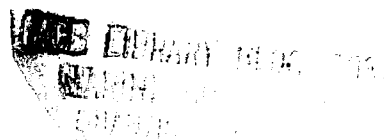
ON TO TARAWA

The departure from Wellington of the 2d Marine Division was shrouded in secrecy. Announced destination of the division was Hawkes Bay, the site of most amphibious exercises, and a rumor was planted that the troops would be back in Wellington in time for a scheduled dance. "With regard to the dance," reminisced Julian Smith, "one of the Division wits remarked that maybe we didn't leave many broken hearts in New Zealand but we certainly left a lot of broken dates."⁵³

Instead of steaming to Hawkes Bay, the transports joined Admiral Hill's Southern Attack Force at Efate in the New Hebrides, where rehearsals were held. During the first of these, troops landed at Mele Bay while the support ships simulated a bombardment of Pango Point. The second rehearsal saw the division land again at Mele Bay and the warships actually pump shells into Erradaka Island. At this time, the commander of the assault regiment, Colonel William McN. Marshall, fell ill. To replace the stricken leader, Julian Smith selected his operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel David M. Shoup, who was spot promoted to colonel.

On 13 November, Task Force 53 set sail for Tarawa, but not until the following day did Julian Smith announce to his men the name of the island which they were to assault. "I know

⁵³ Smith, "Tarawa," p. 1169.



...," read his message to the division, "you will decisively defeat and destroy the treacherous enemies of our country; your success will add new laurels to the glorious tradition of our Corps."⁵⁴ An intensive briefing for all hands followed this announcement, and the mighty task force bored onward toward its goal.

The first contact with the enemy came on 18 November, when a carrier plane sighted a Japanese aircraft far in the distance. On the following morning, a four-engine patrol bomber was picked up on radar, intercepted, and destroyed. No waves of bombers challenged Hill's ships as they began their final approach to Tarawa. At 2033, 19 November, USS *Ringgold*, the destroyer leading the task force, picked up Maina Atoll, and Hill's ships altered course to close with their objective.

Around midnight the fire support sections began steaming to their assigned stations. Transports crammed with Marines eased into unloading areas. Finally, at 0507 on 20 November, shore batteries on Betio opened fire, and the battle was underway.

General Holland Smith did not accompany the Tarawa expedition, for he had been ordered to embark in Admiral Turner's flagship, and the latter officer had taken personal command of the Makin task force. The admiral reasoned that since Makin was nearer to the Marshalls, Japanese surface units, if they chose to intervene, would prob-

ably strike the Northern Attack Force.

Events during the approach of the Northern Attack Force seemed to bear out Turner's theory. On 18 November a Japanese bomber attacked a group of LSTs but was beaten off by antiaircraft fire. Another bomber appeared the following afternoon and fell victim to Navy fighters. A night attack, delivered against the LSTs on 19 November, ended with the destruction of one enemy bomber and the escape of a second.⁵⁵ The Japanese, however, did not contest the final maneuvering of the task force, and at first light on 20 November the preliminary bombardment began.

The Japanese were never able to carry out the ambitious program of counterattacks against a Gilberts invasion force envisioned in their *Z Operation* plan. The carrier aircraft that were to have sortied from Truk and the Bismarcks had been severely depleted in a series of air battles over Rabaul in early November, as Admiral Halsey's and General MacArthur's fliers struck the enemy base in covering strikes for the landing at Bougainville.⁵⁶ Although it was not known at the time, Admiral Turner's Assault Force was insured against an enemy attack in any significant strength.

⁵⁵ Four Japanese bombers failed to return from attacks made on the 19th and 10 from attacks mounted on the 20th. *Japanese Gilberts Comments*.

⁵⁶ For the story of this significant series of aerial assaults see Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, pp. 481-486.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Stockman, *Tarawa*, p. 86.

The Assault on Betio¹

PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO H-HOUR

The transports halted at approximately 0355,² and the Marines of Combat Team 2 began groping down the sides of their ships toward the LCVPs waiting below. The troopships, victims of an unexpectedly strong current, had halted in the wrong area and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *VAC AR*; *TF 53 AR*; 2d MarDiv Rpt on GALVANIC, dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; 2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl, 19Nov-4Dec43, hereafter *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; 2d MarDiv ADC Jnl, 19-21Dec43; 2d Mar Rpt of Ops, Betio Island (including 1/2, 2/2, 3/2, 2/8, WpnsCo, and H&S Co ARs), dtd 21Dec43, hereafter *2d Mar Op Rpt*; 2d Mar UJnl, 12-24Nov43; 8thMar SAR (including 3/8 AR), dtd 1Dec43, hereafter *8th Mar SAR*; 18th Mar CbtRpt (including 1/18, 2/18, and 3/18 CbtRpts), dtd 23Dec43, hereafter *18th Mar CbtRpt*; 10th Mar Rpt of Ops, Tarawa, (including 1/10, 2/10, 3/10, 4/10, and 5/10 Notes on or Rpts of Ops), dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *10th Mar OpRpt*; 2d PhibTracBn SAR, dtd 23Dec43, hereafter *2d PhibTracBn SAR*; 2d TkBn SAR, dtd 14Dec43, hereafter *2d TkBn SAR*; BGen Merritt A. Edson, "Tarawa Operation," lecture delivered at MCS, Quantico, Va., 6Jan44, cited hereafter as *Edson Lecture*; Stockman, *Tarawa*; Johnston, *Follow Me*; Isley and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*.

² *TF 53 AR*, Anx A, p. 18. The times for various actions of the task force contained in this document have been accepted as accurate. Stockman, *Tarawa*, p. 11, maintains that disembarkation had begun by 0320.

masked certain of Admiral Hill's fire-support ships. The task force commander at 0431³ ordered the transports to stop disgorging the troops and steam northward to their proper positions. As the larger vessels glided off into the night, the landing craft attempted to follow, but some of the LCVPs became separated from their assigned ships. Rounding up these strays further delayed unloading, subsequent transfer of men from landing craft to amphibian tractors, and the final formation of the assault waves.

From 0507, when enemy shore batteries first opened fire, until 0542, American warships attempted to reduce these troublesome batteries and neutralize known enemy positions. The naval guns then fell silent to enable carrier planes to scourge the objective. Admiral Hill ceased firing to prevent possible collisions between shells and planes as well as to allow the dust raised by explosions to settle before the pilots began diving toward their targets. Unexpectedly, the aircraft failed to appear. One explanation for this failure is that the request for a dawn attack may have been misunderstood, with the result that the strike was scheduled in-

³ Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, holds that this maneuver took place at 0550. Other sources indicate that the transports actually shifted position sometime between 0430 and 0510.

stead for sunrise. This seems logical, for the fast carriers, from which the planes were to be launched, had been excused from the Efate rehearsals where any misinterpretation of orders would have come to light. Another version maintains that the principal commanders of Task Force 52 had agreed to a strike at 0610 because pilots diving from sun-filled skies toward the darkened earth could not locate their targets. This change, the account continues, was incorporated into the overall plan for both task forces, the information was passed to the carrier pilots, but somehow word did not reach Admiral Hill at Efate. Since the planes materialized over both Makin and Tarawa within a few minutes of sunrise, this too seems plausible.⁴ Whatever the reason, the enemy was granted a brief respite from the storm of high explosives that was breaking around him.

Earlier that morning, when the *Maryland* had opened fire against Betio, the concussion from her main batteries had damaged her radio equipment, leaving Admiral Hill without any means of contacting the tardy planes. While Hill waited, Japanese gunners took advantage of the lull to hurl shells at the transports. The admiral scanned the skies until 0605, at which time he again turned his guns on the island. After the supporting warships had resumed firing, the transports, which had unloaded all troops in the initial assault waves, steamed out of range of the determined enemy gunners. At 0613, the

aircraft finally appeared over Betio, naval gunfire again ceased, and for about 10 minutes the planes swept low over the objective, raking it with bombs and machine gun fire. Because the Japanese had taken cover in concrete or log emplacements, neither bomb fragments nor bullets did them much harm. Yet, the blossoming explosions looked deadly, and as the pilots winged seaward, the warships returned to their grim task of battering the island. This resumption of naval gunfire marked the beginning of the prelanding bombardment.

A few minutes after sunrise, the minesweeper USS *Pursuit*, carrying on board a pilot familiar with the atoll, began clearing the entrance to Tarawa lagoon. Astern of this vessel was another minesweeper, USS *Requisite*. Smoke pots laid by LCVPs were used to screen the sweeping operation.⁵ Two destroyers, the USS *Ringgold* and *Dashiell*, waited off the entrance until a passage had been cleared. Fortunately for both *Pursuit* and *Requisite*, the pair of destroyers were in position to silence, at least temporarily, the shore batteries that had opened fire on the minesweepers. Once a path had been cleared, the *Pursuit*, assisted by an observation plane, began marking the line of departure, assault lanes, and those shoals which might cripple ships or small craft. In the meantime, the other minesweeper steamed out to sea to pick up the destroyers and lead them into the lagoon.

The enemy batteries, so recently silenced, again began firing as the destroyers came through the passage. A

⁴ Cf. Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, p. 219n; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*, p. 156.

⁵ Hill interview/comments.

shell sliced through the thin skin of the *Ringgold*, penetrated to the after engine room, but failed to explode. Another dud glanced off a torpedo tube, whistled through the sick bay, and thudded to a stop in the emergency radio room. Moments after the guns of the ship had been unleashed at the supposed artillery position, a vivid explosion rocked the area. One of the destroyer shells must have touched off the enemy ammunition supply.

At 0715, the *Pursuit*, which had taken position astride the line of departure, switched on her searchlight to guide the waves of LVTs through the curtain of dust and smoke that hung between the minesweeper and the assembly area. While the *Ringgold* was fighting her duel with Japanese cannoners, the *Pursuit* tracked the approaching waves on radar. The minesweeper reported to Admiral Hill that the assault waves were 24 minutes behind schedule and could not possibly reach the beaches by 0830, the time designated as H-Hour.⁶ Lieutenant Commander Robert A. Macpherson, flying spotter plane off the *Maryland*, also reported that the LVTs could not meet the schedule, so Hill, in the *Maryland*, radioed instructions to postpone H-Hour until 0845.⁷

When the task force commander issued this order the erratic radios of the *Maryland* were still misbehaving. Though in contact with surface craft, Hill could not raise the aircraft that were scheduled to attack Betio just before H-Hour.⁸ While his communica-

tions men were struggling with the balky radio sets, the admiral at 0823 received a report from Lieutenant Commander Macpherson that the amphibian tractors had just crossed the line of departure.⁹ Since tests had indicated the lead LVT(2)s could make 4-4½ knots, he granted them an additional 40 minutes in which to reach the beach and announced that H-Hour would be 0900.

At this point, carrier planes reappeared over Betio and began strafing the assault beaches, delivering what was supposed to have been a last-minute attack. The cessation of main battery fire on the *Maryland* enabled its support air control radio to reach the planes so that Hill could call off the premature strike. The aviators finally made their runs between 0855 and 0900.

While the fliers were waiting their turn, the task force continued blasting the island. Five minutes before H-Hour, Hill's support ships shifted their fires inland, the planes strafed the beaches, and at 0900 the bombardment, except for the shells fired by the two destroyers in the lagoon, was stopped.

Awesome as it had been, the preliminary bombardment did not knock out all the defenses. The coast defense guns had been silenced, many of the dual purpose antiaircraft weapons and antiboat guns had been put out of action, but most of the concrete pillboxes and emplacements protected by coconut logs and sand survived both bombs and

are the transmitters, receivers, and antenna so close to each other as to cause mutual interference, but several of the installations, particularly SAC [Support Air Control] equipment were made entirely inoperative during main battery gunfire." *TF 53 AR, Anx A*, p. 62.

⁹ *Hill interview/comments.*

⁶ USS *Pursuit*, *Requisite*, and *Ringgold* ARs, dtd 6, 13, and 1Dec43.

⁷ *Hill interview/comments.*

⁸ In regard to the communication setup on his flagship, Admiral Hill reported: "not only

shells. Of major importance, however, was the effect of the preliminary bombardment on Japanese communications. According to some of the prisoners taken during the battle, the preinvasion shelling had ripped up the enemy's wire and forced him to rely on messengers. Since these runners often were killed or pinned down by bursting shells, few messages got through.

Betio has been compared in shape to a bird, whose legs were formed by the 500-yard pier that passed just beyond the fringing reef. On 20 November, as H-Hour drew near, the bird appeared lifeless, the plumage on its carcass badly charred. Colonel Shoup had decided to use three of his landing teams in the assault and hold one in reserve. Major Henry P. Crowe's 2/8, attached for this operation to the 2d Marines, was given the job of storming Beach Red 3. This objective was the bird's belly, the invasion beach that lay east of the long pier. Ordered to land on Crowe's right was Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Amey's 2/2. Amey was to attack Beach Red 2, the breast of the bird, which included the base of the pier and stretched 500 yards westward to an indentation in the shoreline. Major John F. Schoettel's 3/2 would land to the right of Amey's battalion, assaulting Beach Red 1, a crescent-shaped portion of the coast that measured about 500 yards in width and served as throat and lower bill for the bird of Betio. The legs, or long pier, were reserved for the 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon, which was to secure its objective immediately before the assault waves landed. In regimental reserve was 1/2 commanded by Major Wood B. Kyle. (See Map III, Map Section.)

THE LANDINGS

The precisely arranged waves of amphibian tractors that roared across the line of departure had difficulty in making headway toward the island. At the time, the slowness of the assault waves was blamed upon "overloading, wind, sea, and an ebb tide, together with poor mechanical condition of a number of the leading LVTs."¹⁰ Students of the operation, as well as the men who fought at Betio, have since absolved the wind, sea, and tide of some of the responsibility for the tardiness of the assault waves. The time lost earlier in the morning when the transports had first shifted their anchorage could not be made up. Because they had missed the rehearsals, the drivers of the new LVT(2)s were not familiar with signals, speeds, and load limitations, a factor which slowed both the transfer of men from the LCVPs and the forming of assault waves. The waves had to dress on the slowest tractors, and fully loaded LVT(1)s could not keep up with the LVT(2)s. The older vehicles were not in sound enough mechanical condition to maintain even 4 knots during their long journey from assembly area to the assault beaches.¹¹

While the assault waves were moving from the line of departure toward the Betio reef, Japanese shells first began bursting over the Marines huddled inside the amphibian tractors. These air bursts proved ineffectual, as did the

¹⁰ CinCPac Monthly Rpt, Nov43, Anx E (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹¹ Isley and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 227-228; MajGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jun47, hereafter *Watson ltr*; *Hill interview/comments*.

long-range fire of machine guns on Betio, and none of the tractors was damaged. Upon crossing the reef, the LVTs swam into a hail of machine gun and antiboat fire, but even so casualties among the troops were relatively light. Few of the LVTs failed to reach the beach.

The first unit to land on Betio was First Lieutenant William D. Hawkins' 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon,¹² a part of which gained the end of the pier at 0855. Hawkins, with engineer Second Lieutenant Alan G. Leslie, Jr., and four men, secured the ramp that sloped downward from the pier to the edge of the reef. Next, the platoon leader ordered the men who had remained in the boat to scramble up the ramp. When enemy fire began crackling around the gasoline drums that the Japanese had stored at the end of the pier, Hawkins waved the men back into their LCV. With his four scouts and Leslie, who was carrying a flamethrower, he began advancing shoreward along the pier, methodically destroying or clearing anything that might shelter enemy snipers. Blazing gasoline from Leslie's weapon splattered against two shacks that were thought to be serving as machinegun nests, the flimsy structures ignited like twin torches, but unfortunately the flames spread to the pier itself. Although the gap burned in the pier by this fire would later handicap the movement of supplies, this difficulty was a small price to pay for driving the enemy from a position that gave him

the opportunity of pouring enfilade fire into the assault waves.

After the Japanese on the pier had been killed, Hawkins and his handful of men rejoined the rest of the section in the LCV and moved along the boat channel toward the island. Beyond the end of the pier, Hawkins tried unsuccessfully to commandeer an LVT to carry his men to the beach. In the meantime, the second boatload of scout-snipers was being held off the reef on order of a control officer. The platoon leader finally made contact with them, got hold of three LVTs, and started the entire platoon toward shore. Two tractor loads, Hawkins among them, landed in the proper place and reported to the regimental command post, but the third group came ashore on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2 to join in the fighting there. The difficulties in getting ashore experienced by the 2d Scout-Sniper Platoon were typical of the Betio operation.¹³

Two of the assault battalions hurled against Betio made the last part of their shoreward journey unaided by naval gunfire. Dust and smoke screened the movement of the LVTs, so that the distance yet to be traveled could not be accurately gauged. At 0855, according to plan, all but two ships in Hill's task force lifted their fires to avoid striking either the advancing tractors or the planes which were beginning their final 5-minute strafing of the beaches. Out in the lagoon, however, the destroyers *Ringgold* and *Dashiell* continued to loft 5-inch shells into Red 3. These ships, whose officers

¹² A scout-sniper platoon from the 8th Marines also saw action at Betio. There is no record of the employment of a similar unit by the 6th Marines.

¹³ H&S Co OpRpt of Sgt-Sniper Plat, dtd 15Dec43, Encl J to 2d MarDiv OpRpt.



DAMAGED LVTs and the bodies of Marines killed during the landing on Betio are grim witnesses to the fury of D-Day. (USMC 63578)



RUBBER RAFT is used to float wounded men across the lagoon reef to LCVPs waiting offshore at Betio. (USMC 63454)

were able to follow the progress of the tractor waves, did not cease firing until 0910.

The first assault battalion to reach its assigned beach was Major Schoettel's 3/2, which landed on Red 1 at 0910. On the right half of that beach, and at the extreme right of Combat Team 2, the Marines of Company I leaped from their LVTs, clambered over the log beach barricade, and began advancing inland. On the left of the beach, astride the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2, was a Japanese strongpoint, which raked Company K with flanking fire before that unit could gain the shelter of the barricade. After getting ashore, Company K was to have tied in with the troops on neighboring Red 2. Since the company commander could see no Marines in that direction, he made contact with Company I and did not attempt to advance toward his left.¹⁴ During the next two hours, these assault companies of 3/2 would lose over half their men.

Little better was the lot of Company L and the battalion mortar platoon. These units, boated in LCVPs, grounded on the reef 500 yards offshore. While wading toward Red 1, Company L suffered 35 percent casualties.

The next battalion to touch down on Betio was Major Crowe's 2/8, which reached Red 3 at 0917, just seven minutes after the destroyers in the lagoon had ceased firing. The fire of these warships had kept the Japanese underground as the Marines neared the beach, and the enemy did not have time

to recover from the effects of the barrage before the incoming troops were upon him. Two LVTs found a gap in the beach barricade and were able to churn as far inland as the airstrip before unloading their men. The other amphibians halted before the log obstacle, discharged their troops, and turned about to report to the control boats cruising in the lagoon. Of the 552 men in the first three waves that struck Red 3, fewer than 25 became casualties during the landing.

The most violently opposed landing was that made by Lieutenant Colonel Amey's 2/2. Company F and most of Company E gained Red 2 at 0922, but one platoon of Company E was driven off course by machine gun and antiboat fire and forced to land on Red 1. Although Company G arrived only three minutes behind the other companies to lend its weight to the attack, the battalion could do no more than carve out a beachhead about 50 yards in depth. Losses were heavy, with about half the men of Company F becoming casualties.

NOTHING LEFT TO LAND

Behind the first three waves of amphibian tractors, came two waves of LCVPs and LCMs carrying additional infantrymen, tanks, and artillery. When the leading waves had crawled across the reef, they discovered that the depth of water over this obstacle varied from three feet to a few inches. Since standard landing craft had drafts close to four feet, they were barred from approaching the beach. Infantrymen and pack howitzer crews had to transfer to LVTs or wade ashore with their weapons and equipment. The tanks

¹⁴ Rpt of Capt James W. Crain, n.d., in Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs, dtd 22Dec43, hereafter *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

were forced to leave the LCMs at the edge of the reef and try to reach Betio under their own power.

The men who attempted to wade to the island suffered the heaviest casualties on D-Day. Japanese riflemen and machine gunners caught the reserve elements as they struggled through the water.¹⁶ The only cover available was that provided by the long pier, and a great many men died before they reached this structure. During the movement to the beach, platoons and sections became separated from their parent companies, but junior officers and noncommissioned officers met the challenge by pushing their men forward on their own initiative. On D-Day, few reserve units reached Betio organized in their normal combat teams.

Like the reserve and supporting units, the battalion command groups were unable to move directly to their proper beaches. All the battalion commanders, each with a part of his staff, had embarked in landing craft which took position between the third and fourth waves as their units started toward the island. As was true with the assault waves, the least difficulty was encountered at Red 3, but establishing command posts on Red 2 and Red 1 proved extremely hazardous.

The first landing craft to slam onto the reef off Red 3 was that carrying Major Crowe, a part of his communications section, and other members of his battalion headquarters. On the way in, one of Crowe's officers told him that if things did not go well on the first

day, the staff could swim back to the transport, brew some coffee, and decide what to do next. "Jim Crowe," recalled First Lieutenant Kenneth J. Fagan, "let out with his bull bellow of a laugh and said it was today, and damn soon, or not at all."¹⁸ When his boat grounded on the reef, Crowe fitted action to these words, ordered his men to spread out and start immediately for the island, and reached Betio about four minutes after his assault companies. Such speed was impossible on Red 2 and Red 1, beaches that had not received a last-minute shelling from the pair of destroyers in the lagoon.

Off Red 2, Lieutenant Colonel Amey's LCM also failed to float over the reef, but the commander of 2/2 was fortunate enough to flag down two empty LVTs that were headed back to the transports. These amphibian tractors became separated during the trip toward the island, and the one carrying Amey halted before a barbed wire entanglement. The battalion commander then attempted to wade the rest of the distance, but after he had taken a few steps he was killed by a burst from a machine gun. Lieutenant Colonel Walter I. Jordan, an observer from the 4th Marine Division and the senior officer present, was ordered by Colonel Shoup to take command until Major Howard J. Rice, the battalion executive officer, could get ashore.¹⁷ Although Rice was a mere 13 minutes behind the first assault waves, he was in no posi-

¹⁶ Quoted in *Watson ltr.*

¹⁸ Capt James R. Stockman, Notes on an Interview with Col David M. Shoup, dtd 26 May 1947, hereafter *Shoup-Stockman interview*.

¹⁷ *Shoup interview/comments*; Rpt of LtCol Walter I. Jordan, dtd 27Oct43, in Rpts by SplObservers on GALVANIC, Encl G to VAC AR, hereafter *Jordan Rpt.*

tion to relieve Jordan of responsibility for 2/2. The executive officer was pinned down and out of contact with his unit, so Jordan retained command until he was relieved of this task by Shoup.

Though the beachhead held by Jordan's men was admittedly precarious, the most disturbing news came from neighboring Red 1, where 3/2 was in action. There the battalion commander, Major Schoettel, was unable to get ashore until late in the afternoon. At 0959, Schoettel informed Colonel Shoup that the situation on Red 1 was in doubt. "Boats held up on reef of right flank Red 1," said his next message, "troops receiving heavy fire in water." Shoup then ordered the battalion commander to land his reserve over Red 2 and attack westward. To this the major replied, "We have nothing left to land."¹⁸

Colonel Shoup and his regimental headquarters experienced difficulties similar to those that had plagued the battalion commanders. At the reef, Shoup happened upon an LVT which was carrying wounded out to the transports. The colonel had these casualties transferred to his LCVP, commandeered the amphibian tractor, and started toward the left half of Red 2. As the tractor neared the island, it entered a maelstrom of fire and a hail of shell fragments "started coming down out of the air. It was strong enough to go through your dungarees and cut you," Shoup recalled. Then, as the command group continued its way

shoreward, he said, "a kid named White was shot, the LVT was holed, and the driver went into the water. At that point I said, 'let's get out of here,' moved my staff over the side and waded to the pier. From then on it was a matter of getting from the pier on down. You could say my CP was in the boat, then in the LVT, and then on the pier on the way in, but there was very little business conducted."¹⁹ After determining what portion of Red 2 was in the hands of 2/2, Shoup established his command post on that beach at approximately 1200.

Even before he reached the island, Colonel Shoup kept a close rein on the operations of his command. At 0958, in the midst of his exchange of messages with Major Schoettel, he directed his reserve battalion, 1/2, to land on Red 2 and attack westward toward the embattled Marines on Red 1. Shoup's plan, however, was slow of execution, for only enough LVTs could be rounded up to carry Companies A and B. Company C had to wait until noon for transportation. While Major Kyle's battalion was moving toward Red 2, the leading waves of amphibian tractors drew heavy fire from the right hand portion of the beach. As a result, some of the vehicles veered from course to touch down on Red 1, and the 4 officers and 110 men that they carried joined in the fighting there. The remainder of the LVTs bored onward to the left half of Red 2, where the bulk of Kyle's command aided in expanding the beachhead. Not until the morning of the second day was the entire battalion ashore on Betio.

¹⁸ LT 3/2 to CO CT 2, ser no. 27, CO CT 2 to LT 3/2, ser no. 28, and LT 3/2 to CO CT 2, ser no. 30, in *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl.*

¹⁹ *Shoup interview/comments.*

3/8 IS COMMITTED

At his command post in the *Maryland*, General Julian Smith was convinced that a foothold had been won, but he realized how vital it was that the attack be kept moving. Because the 6th Marines had been placed under the control of Turner, Julian Smith had but two battalion landing teams as his own reserve. These two units were Major Robert H. Ruud's 3/8 and 1/8 commanded by Major Lawrence C. Hays, Jr. The commanding general could select the regimental headquarters of the parent 8th Marines to control either or both of its battalions.

At 1018 on the morning of D-Day, Julian Smith radioed Colonel Elmer E. Hall, commanding officer of the 8th Marines, to send 3/8 to the line of departure where it would come under the tactical control of Colonel Shoup. Since Shoup was more familiar with the situation on Betio, it was logical that he, rather than Hall, should determine where this portion of the reserve would be landed. Ruud's battalion became a part of Shoup's command at 1103 and was promptly ordered to land on Red 3 in support of Crowe's 2/8.

Since Shoup and his party were moving alongside the pier at this time, he could watch what was happening to the incoming Marines. As soon as their boats grounded on the reef and the ramps were lowered, Ruud's men started wading toward the island. Landward of the reef, the water proved deep, in places well over a man's head. Some Marines, weighted down by the equipment, plunged into deep water and drowned; others were killed by enemy bullets and shell fragments. Only 100

men from Ruud's first wave, approximately 30 percent of the total, survived the ordeal to set foot on Betio.

From the pier, Shoup and his staff signalled frantically to the men of the second wave, directing these troops to seek the shelter of the pier. This structure, however, offered little protection, so the toll claimed by Japanese gunners continued to mount. "Third wave landed on Beach Red 3 were practically wiped out," reported Ruud—who had lost radio contact with Shoup—to Hall. "Fourth wave landed on Beach Red 3," he continued, "but only a few men got ashore and the remainder pulled away under heavy MG and 37mm fire."²⁰ Shortly after the fourth wave landed, the battalion commander received a message to "Land no further troops until directed." The remainder of the battalion gathered off the end of the pier and was finally ordered in about 1500. By 1730, all of 3/8 was ashore, and, on Shoup's orders, Ruud deployed one of his companies to plug a gap directly inland from the pier between 2/8 and 1/2.²¹ Company K, which had landed in the first waves, was already attached to Crowe's battalion and continued to serve with 2/8 through the rest of the battle.

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

In spite of the light losses suffered by the LVTs that carried the assault waves, the number of amphibian tractors available to the division dwindled

²⁰ LT 3/8 to CO CT 8, ser no. 88, *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl.*

²¹ Col Robert H. Ruud comments on draft MS, dtd ca. 10Aug62.

rapidly as the day progressed. Some were destroyed while bringing supplies or reinforcements to the island, others were so badly damaged that they sank upon reaching the deep water of the lagoon, and a few either broke down or ran out of gas. To reduce losses to a minimum, the LVTs had to be restricted to the boat channel that paralleled the long pier, but even so Japanese gunners still managed to cripple some of the incoming amphibians.

General Julian Smith realized that he could not afford a stalemate at the beaches. Strength would have to be built up rapidly and the attack pressed vigorously if Betio were to be taken with a minimum of losses. Yet, after the assault waves had gained a foothold, the operation bogged down, for the reef effectively barred landing boats, and the number of LVTs available for duty was fast diminishing. Since the battle was raging only a few yards inland, the reserve units that attempted to wade ashore were under fire from the moment they stepped into the water. Those who survived the trek from reef to beach found themselves in the thick of the fight as soon as they set foot on the island.

Reserve units became so disorganized while wading toward shore that battalion and even company control was virtually impossible. The resultant confusion was offset by the grim determination of the individual Marines, who simply kept coming in spite of all the enemy could hurl at them. For a distance of 400 yards, Japanese machine gunners or riflemen grazed the water with streams of bullets. The only cover available to the Marines was that afforded by the pier, and even from

here they had no opportunity to fight back. All the attackers could do was take their punishment and keep moving. Many Marines were hit in the water, but the survivors waded onward, moving doggedly to join their comrades ashore.

During the early morning, the situation on Betio was literally cloudy, for the explosions of shells and bombs had sent a column of dust and smoke towering above the island. As the morning wore on, the smoke from burning emplacements and buildings continued to cloak parts of the island so that it was impossible, even from the air, to see much of the island at one time. Neither Julian Smith nor Colonel Shoup could observe much of the action ashore. The general had remained in the *Maryland*, the best place, given adequate communications, from which to control his division.²² The movements of the commander ashore were restricted and his communications, especially with the unit on Red 1, unreliable. Colonel Shoup, however, was by no means pinned down. "Once ashore," he recalled, "I was never off my feet for over 50 hours, standing for the most time protected by an enemy pillbox with 26 live Japs therein."²³

By noon, the situation ashore began to come into sharper focus. Colonel Shoup made contact with his subordinates, and requests for medical supplies, ammunition, and air support

²² The transport group commander offered the opinion that Julian Smith "could have had much more ready communication means (radio, boats, etc.) than were available to him on the *Maryland*" on board the comparatively close-in transport flagship. *Knowles ltr.*

²³ *Shoup-Stockman interview.*

began trickling back to the *Maryland*. Julian Smith also profited from observation flights made during the afternoon by naval pilots. Little information, however, could be had concerning the battle on Red 1.

THE FIGHTING ASHORE

A source of grave concern throughout the morning was the fate of 3/2 on Beach Red 1. Actually, Major Schoettel's men, though isolated from the other Marines on Betio, had fared better than Julian Smith suspected. The assault companies had received a severe scourging as they started moving inland, but Major Michael P. Ryan, commander of Company L, managed to organize an effective fighting force from remnants of several units. By midafternoon, his contingent could boast portions of every company of 3/2, four platoons and part of the headquarters of 2/2, as well as the 113 officers and men of 1/2 who had been driven off course during their attempt to reach Red 2. Among the members of 2/2 who ended up on Red 1 was Major Rice, the battalion executive officer, who had with him a usable radio. This set provided Ryan his only link with Colonel Shoup's command post.

During the afternoon, Ryan's Marines consolidated their beachhead on Betio's beak, clearing an area 500 yards deep and 150 yards wide. The farthest penetration made by this conglomerate command was to the antitank ditch 300 yards from the south coast of the island, but this advanced position could not be held with the number of men at Ryan's disposal. For this reason he pulled back to within 300 yards of the

tip of the beak and dug in for the night.

The key to Ryan's success was the pair of medium tanks that reached Red 1 about 1130. All Shermans employed at Betio were from the Company C, I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) Tank Battalion, the entire company having been attached to the 2d Marine Division for GALVANIC. Company C joined the division at Efate and made the voyage to Tarawa in the USS *Ashland*, a new LSD.

On D-Day morning, a total of six medium tanks started toward Red 1 in LCMs, but the coxswains of these craft could find no place to unload. Fortunately, Major Schoettel happened upon these boats as they were circling off the reef and ordered them to run up on the reef and lower their ramps. The Shermans then nosed into the water to begin a 1,200-yard journey to the island. Reconnaissance parties waded in front of the tanks, carefully marking pot-holes with flags, so none of the tanks drowned out before reaching the beach. As the lumbering vehicles approached a gap already blown in the log barricade, the platoon leader saw to his horror that the coral sands were littered with wounded and dead. Rather than risk crushing those Marines who were still alive, he led the platoon back into the water, drove to a position off Green Beach, and waited for engineers to pierce the barrier. During this second move, four tanks wandered into pot-holes, drowning out their engines.²⁴ Both the surviving Shermans were hit during Ryan's advance. One was gutted by flames, but the other, with only its bow machine gun still in work-

²⁴ *Ibid.*

ing order, was used to protect the flank of the beachhead during the night.

Ryan's men held the beak of the Betio bird, but the head, throat, back, and most of the breast were controlled by the enemy. The nearest American troops were elements of 1/2 and 2/2 fighting on that part of Red 2 near the pier, an area some 600 yards from the Red 1 perimeter. That part of the line manned by 1/2, originally Shoup's reserve, extended from a point about 350 yards inland from the base of the pier along the triangular plot formed by the runway and west taxiway then veered toward the beach. The area between 1/2 and the edge of the water was the zone of 2/2, the battalion that had stormed Red 2.

Both medium tanks and artillery reached Red 2 before D-Day had ended. Three Shermans that had landed on Red 3 crossed the boundary and halted in a previously selected assembly area. This trio of tanks supported 2/2 in its advance toward the runway by rolling up to pillboxes and firing at point blank range through the openings in these structures. Two of the Shermans were knocked out, but one of these was retrieved on the following morning.

The artillery that arrived on Red 2, 1/10 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey, had first been destined for Red 1. A member of Colonel Shoup's command post group, Rixey had landed before noon. In the meantime, his 75mm pack howitzers and their crews were boated at the line of departure awaiting further orders. During the afternoon it became apparent to both Shoup and Rixey that Red 1 was no place to land artillery, and they finally decided to bring the battalion

ashore over Red 2. Since the boats carrying the unit could not cross the reef, LVTs had to be found. Two gun sections, one from Battery A and one from Battery B, were transferred to amphibian tractors and at dusk ordered ashore. Also ordered to land were three howitzers and crews of Battery C, elements that were believed to be in LVTs but which had not yet actually been shifted from their original landing craft. The two sections in the tractors moved rapidly to Red 2. The other three were boated to the edge of the pier where the artillerymen plunged into the water and began wading ashore carrying their dismantled pack howitzers. None of the guns reached the beach until after dark, and the crews could do little more than wait, ready to move into position at dawn.²⁵

Inland of the pier, at the dividing line between Red 2 and Red 3, responsibility passed to elements of 3/8 and Crowe's 2/8. Its initial blow at the midsection of Betio had carried a part of Crowe's battalion into the triangle formed by the runway and taxistrip, but on the left flank his men collided with a powerful strongpoint near the base of the Burns-Philp pier. During the afternoon, some 70 Marines from 3/8 were sent into the triangle to hold that sector of the line. A group of men, survivors of various battalions whose weapons had been lost or ruined by water, were found crouching under the Burns-Philp pier, led ashore, re-armed, and fed into the battle being waged on Crowe's left flank.²⁶

Throughout D-Day, the Marines of

²⁵ Shoup interview/comments.

²⁶ Watson ltr.

2/8 attempted to batter their way through the fortifications inland of Burns-Philp pier in order to advance eastward along Betio's tail. Four medium tanks from the Company C, IMAC Tank Battalion, threw their weight and firepower into this effort but to no avail. One Sherman was destroyed by a friendly dive bomber, a second bulled its way into an excavation used by the enemy as a fuel dump and was burned when an American plane set the gasoline aflame, and a third was disabled by Japanese gunners. Although damaged by an enemy shell, the fourth tank continued to fight.

REBUILDING A RESERVE

General Julian Smith's decision to land 3/8 left him with but a single landing team in division reserve. Early in the afternoon, it began to appear as though it might be necessary to land 1/8, the last of the reserve, to help the five battalions already in the fight. If this were done, the general would be left with no reserve except for his support group, made up of elements of the 10th Marines (artillery), the 18th Marines (engineers), Special Troops, and Service Troops. In short, he would be forced to rely upon an assortment of specialists in case of an emergency.

There was present, however, an organized unit which might spell the difference between victory and defeat. This was the 6th Marines, designated as corps reserve and under the control of Admiral Turner. Having informed Holland Smith of the situation at Betio, the division commander at 1331 requested the release of the 6th Marines to his control. Admiral Hill seconded

Julian Smith's request and within 50 minutes Turner's message of approval arrived. "Meanwhile," commented Julian Smith, "consideration was being given to a plan to organize the support group into provisional battalions."²⁷

Once the 6th Marines had been released to him, Julian Smith felt it safe to land 1/8. At 1343, Colonel Hall's regimental headquarters and his remaining landing team, commanded by Major Hays, was ordered to proceed to the line of departure and wait there for further orders. The division commander then asked Colonel Shoup to recommend the best site for a night landing by this battalion.

This message concerning Hall's unit never reached Colonel Shoup, another of the communications failures so typical of the Tarawa operation. The radios of the *Maryland* had proved balky, and the portable sets carried ashore by the assault troops were little better. Water, shell fragments, bullets, and rough handling played havoc with communications equipment, but some radios were repaired with parts pirated from other damaged sets. Both the TBYs and the MUs, the latter light-weight hand sets, were exceptionally vulnerable to water damage, and the TBX the more durable and somewhat waterproof battalion radio, was so heavy that it could hardly be called portable.

Colonel Hall's headquarters and 1/8, "cramped, wet, hungry, tired, and a large number . . . seasick,"²⁸ waited throughout the afternoon at the line of departure. At 1625, Julian Smith sent

²⁷ Smith, "Tarawa," p. 1173.

²⁸ LtCol Rathvon McC. Tompkins ltr to CMC, dtd 13Jun47.

a message ordering Hall to land on the north shore of the extreme eastern end of the island. These last uncommitted elements of the 8th Marines were to have gone ashore at 1745 and to have attacked to the northwest, but the orders failed to reach the regimental commander.

To observe the general progress of the battle, a scout plane was launched from the *Maryland* at 1548. Colonel Merritt A. Edson, division chief of staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Arnold F. Johnston, the operations officer, contacted the plane and asked the fliers to report any movements in the area where 1/8 was waiting. As the observation craft circled overhead, an artillery battery from 1/10 started toward Red 2. Since Hall was believed to have received his orders, the artillerymen were mistaken for a portion of 1/8. The thought that Hall was landing on the wrong beach caused consternation at division headquarters, but his supposed position was duly plotted on the situation map. Not until midnight did the division staff discover that Hall's command was still waiting on the line of departure.

THE FLOW OF SUPPLIES AND INFORMATION²⁹

In assessing the work of his shore party, Lieutenant Colonel Chester J. Salazar admitted that carefully pre-

pared and basically sound standing operating procedure had to be abandoned during the Tarawa operation. Elements of the shore party had difficulty in finding the combat units to which they were assigned. Salazar's demolitions men and bulldozer operators were needed to blast or bury enemy positions, and the assault battalions could not spare riflemen to serve as stevedores on the crowded, hard-won beachheads. Finally, there were not enough LVTs to move supplies directly to the battalions from the ships offshore.

With Colonel Shoup throughout the morning of D-Day was Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, leader of the previous year's Makin raid, who had been assigned to GALVANIC as an observer. Because of the continuing difficulty in keeping radio contact with division, Shoup at 1230 asked Carlson to make his way to the *Maryland* and sketch for Julian Smith an accurate picture of what was happening ashore. The commander of Combat Team 2 could then be certain that higher headquarters knew his basic plan for the conquest of Betio—to expand southward and to unite the beachheads before attempting a final thrust. The division could best help by landing reserves on Red 2. As the two men parted, Shoup told Carlson, "You tell the general and the admiral that we are going to stick and fight it out."³⁰

Before starting toward the lagoon, Carlson noticed some Marines from Ruud's 3/8 clinging to the pier and unable to get into the fight. With

²⁹ Additional source for this section include: Rpts of LtCol Chester J. Salazar and Maj George L. H. Cooper, dtd 22Dec43, in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*; Rpt of LtCol Evans F. Carlson, dtd 27Oct43, in Rpts by SplObservers on GALVANIC, Encl G to VAC AR, hereafter *Carlson Rpt*; MajGen Leo D. Hermle ltr to

CMC, dtd 9Jun47; Maj Ben K. Weatherwax ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jun47.

³⁰ *Shoup-Stockman interview.*

Shoup's permission, Carlson interrupted his journey to bring several LVT-loads of able-bodied infantrymen to the island, returning each time with wounded men whom he had transferred to boats at the reef. This done, he left his tractor at the reef, embarked in an LCVP, and at 1800 reported to Julian Smith in the *Maryland*.

Early in the afternoon the division commander ordered Brigadier General Leo D. Hermle, assistant division commander, to prepare to land his command post group on order. General Hermle was told at 1343 to go to the end of the pier, form an estimate of the situation, and report his findings to General Julian Smith. On the way to the pier he attempted to learn the location of Shoup's command post but could not contact the regimental commander by radio. At 1740, Hermle reported that he had reached the pier and was under fire. He tried a short time later to radio to the *Maryland* details of the action ashore, but again he was victim of a communications failure. He then entrusted the information to a messenger.

While he was on the pier, Hermle managed to establish intermittent radio contact with Shoup and Crowe, who informed him that ammunition and water were desperately needed ashore. Since many Marines from 3/8 had taken cover beneath the pier, Hermle had enough men available to organize carrying parties to bring these vital items to the island. Supplies, which kept arriving by boat throughout the night, were unloaded by the carrying parties and manhandled to the beach. En route to Betio, the Marines doing this important

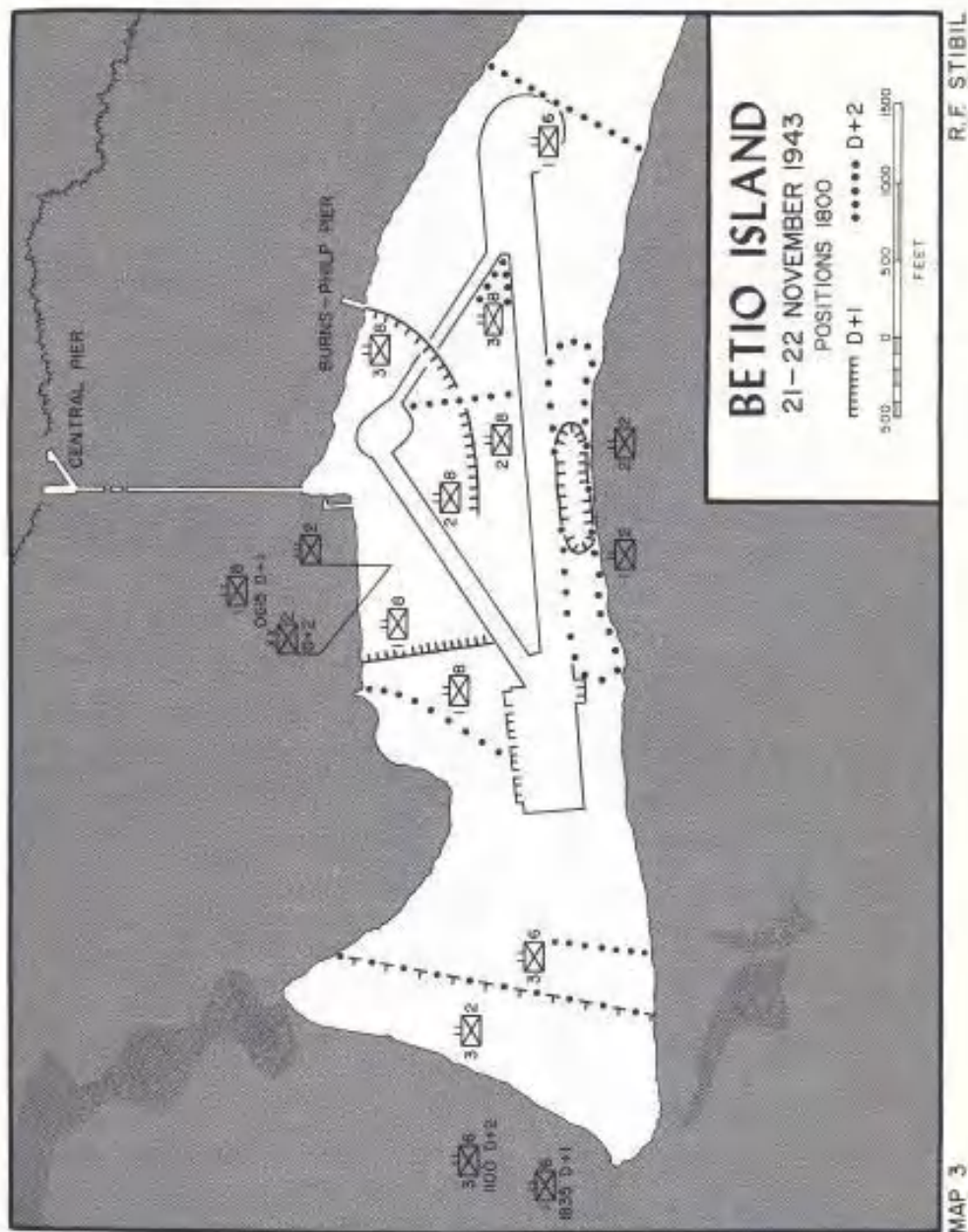
job had to wade through a 50-yard area that was exposed to Japanese fire.

In addition to the able-bodied men who were formed into carrying parties, a number of wounded Marines had gained protection of the pier. Captain French R. Moore (MC), USN, assistant division surgeon and a member of Hermle's party, had the wounded collected, given first aid, and evacuated in landing craft that had finished unloading supplies. The captain later returned to the transport area with a boatload of seriously wounded men.

General Hermle's radio link with Shoup and Crowe was severed early in the evening. About 1930, the assistant division commander sent Major Rathvon McC. Tompkins and Captain Thomas C. Dutton to find Shoup's command post and learn where and when the regimental commander wanted the reserves to land. The two officers, after working their way across a 600-yard strip of coral swept by enemy machine gun fire, reached their goal. They found out the needed information, but it was 0345 before they could report back to Hermle.

Although he had obtained answers to Julian Smith's questions, Hermle lacked a rapid means of communicating this intelligence to the division commander. For this reason, the assistant division commander and his party ventured into the lagoon to use the radio on the destroyer *Ringgold*. Word that Shoup wanted 1/8 to land near the pier on Red 2 was dispatched to the *Maryland* at 0445.

General Hermle next was ordered to report to Julian Smith in the battleship. Here he learned that at 1750 an order had been issued giving him com-



mand of the troops ashore. Because of a communications failure, the message had gone astray. Command ashore was to remain the responsibility of Colonel Shoup.

The transports had been unloading water, plasma, ammunition, and other supplies throughout the day, but judging from the requests that continued to pour in from the island, few of these articles were finding their way to the front lines. Captain Knowles, commander of the transport group, who shared with the division supply section responsibility for coordinating the logistical effort, directed the Assistant D-4, Major Ben K. Weatherwax, to go to Betio and find out what had gone wrong. The major was to contact either General Hermle or Colonel Shoup.

Weatherwax left the transport USS *Monrovia* at 2100 and went to the *Pursuit*, where he obtained directions for landing. He approached Betio by way of the pier, climbing out of his boat on the beach side of the gap burned in the structure by Hawkins' men. Had the major landed at the end of the pier instead of following the boat channel, he would have met General Hermle and learned the details of the logistical situation. As it was, he reached the beachhead, made his way to Shoup's command post, and there learned that the troops ashore needed still more of the types of supplies that already had been sent them. Weatherwax then encountered the same problem that had plagued Hermle—inability to reach the *Monrovia* by radio. He finally went along the pier until he found a boat and arrived at the transport just before dawn. There, he in-

formed Captain Knowles of the supply situation and of the need for getting additional tanks ashore. The transport group commander gave Weatherwax authority to order in any boat with a tank aboard to any beach where there was a good chance for the armor to land.³¹

THE EVENING OF D-DAY

As daylight waned on 20 November, the position of the Marines on Betio seemed precarious. The front lines were perilously close to the beach, and the enemy had effectively dammed the torrent of supplies that was to have sustained the embattled riflemen. Small boats dashed to the end of the pier and unloaded. Carrying parties managed to keep a trickle of supplies moving toward the island, an effort that was supplemented by the work of the surviving LVTs. During the afternoon these tractors had carried water, ammunition, and medical supplies directly to the beaches. In the meantime, the transports were unloading as rapidly as possible. Soon the waters around the line of departure were dotted with landing craft waiting for an opportunity to dart toward the pier and unload their cargoes.

The picture ashore seemed equally confused, with the assault battalions confined to small, crowded areas. Forward progress had been slow, a matter of a few feet at a time. It was worth a man's life to raise his head a few inches. Yet, a Marine could not fire his weapon unless he exposed himself, however briefly. Shoup's men did this

³¹ Knowles ltr.

and even more. "A surprising number . . .," the colonel would recall, "displayed a fearless eagerness to go to the extreme for their country and fellow men."³²

At dusk, the Marines held two separate portions of Betio Island. On the right, Major Ryan's composite unit, isolated from the remainder of Colonel Shoup's command, had withdrawn to a compact perimeter on the island beak. Another perimeter fanned out from the base of the long pier. The segment nearest Ryan's lines was manned by troops from 1/2 and 2/2 and curved from the water into the triangle formed by runway and taxiway. Within this triangle, the left-hand portion of the line was held by 3/8, while 2/8 had responsibility for the sector facing the strongpoint at the base of Burns-Philp pier. The larger perimeter was not a continuous line, for this beachhead was defended by small groups of Marines who had taken advantage of whatever cover they could find.

Most of the Marines on Betio prepared for the night with the uneasy feeling that a Japanese counter-attack was inevitable. On the con-

trol vessels and transports there was a restless feeling that at any moment reports would come flooding in telling of a Japanese attempt to hurl the invaders into the sea. In the *Maryland*, the division staff strained to pick up the sounds of rifle fire that would herald the enemy attack. Silence reigned. Marine fire discipline was superb; few shots were wasted on imagined targets. Enemy weapons too were quiet, for the expected attack never came.

According to Julian Smith, Admiral Shibasaki lost the battle by failing to counterattack on that first night, for never again would the beachhead be so vulnerable. Shibasaki's failure was probably due to a collapse of his communications. The fact that few field message blanks were captured during the course of the battle seems to indicate a reliance on wire communication. Naval gunfire ripped out the carefully strung wire, and the Japanese command post was isolated from troops it was to direct.³³ Important as this lapse in control may have been, it was the combat effectiveness of Shoup's Marines, men who overcame incredible obstacles to maintain cohesive fighting teams, that promised failure to any enemy assault.

³² Gen David M. Shoup, "Some of My Thoughts" (Gen David M. Shoup Personal Folder, HistBr, HQMC). This folder contains notes, impressions, and reminiscences dating from early in the general's career until his appointment as CMC.

³³ Smith, "Tarawa," pp. 1173-1174; Major Eugene P. Boardman ltr to CMC, dtd 16Jun47.

Amphibious Victory¹

1/8 LANDS

Colonel Hall, his regimental headquarters group, and the men of 1/8 had spent the night at the line of departure, waiting in vain for orders to land on Betio. Although division had issued such an order, on the afternoon of D-Day, the message had not reached the regimental commander. Finally, at 0200 on the morning of 21 November, Hall was contacted and told to report the position of 1/8 and the condition of its men. He replied that his Marines, in boats near the control vessel, were “resting easy,” a surprisingly cheerful description of men that had spent over 12 hours in bobbing landing craft.² In 2 1/2 hours, Hall’s radio again came to life, as division headquarters directed him to arrange with the *Pursuit* for a new line of departure and to land his troops at 0900 on D plus 1.

While Hall was preparing to make

this move, General Hermle radioed division headquarters that Colonel Shoup wanted 1/8 to land on Beach Red 2. The general’s message was sent at 0513, and a few minutes later, Hall was told to start at once toward Red 2. Once ashore, 1/8 was to attack westward toward Red 1.

The LCVPs carrying the first waves of 1/8 grounded on the reef at 0615, and the men began wading the 500 yards to shore. En route, the troops were hit from both flanks by machine gun fire. Casualties were severe, and the survivors were badly disorganized. But by 0800, Major Hays, commander of 1/8, had over half his men ashore and under cover. He then reported to Shoup, who told him to reorganize the battalion for an attack westward toward Ryan’s beachhead. This action would have to be fought with machine guns, rifles, and grenades, for Hays’ battalion had lost its demolitions and flamethrowers during the passage from reef to beach.

Of great assistance to the landing of 1/8 were Rixey’s pack howitzers, which had been organized into a five-gun composite battery. During the night, a bulldozer had thrown up an earthen embankment on the exposed sides of the artillery position to protect the cannoneers from small arms fire. Early on the morning of D plus 1, two guns were moved from this makeshift

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *2d MarDiv Op Rpt*; *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *2d Mar OpRpt*; *2d Mar Unit Jnl*, 12-24Nov43; *6th Mar SAR* (including 1/6 and 3/6 SARs), dtd 20Dec43, hereafter *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *18th Mar CbtRpt*; *10 Mar OpRpt*; *2d PhibTracBn SAR*; *2d TkBn SAR*; 2/6 Narrative Account of Ops, 21-29Nov43, n.d.; *Edson Lecture*; Stockman, *Tarawa*.

² *8th Mar SAR*, p. 1.

cover to fire directly into a pair of blockhouses located on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. Using high explosive ammunition with delay fuses from a range of about 125 yards, the Marine howitzers succeeded in penetrating these log and coral structures and in temporarily silencing machine guns that were sited to cut down Hays' incoming troops.³ By 0800, after this mission had been fired, all five howitzer sections were in position to support Shoup's renewed offensive.

Colonel Hall, commanding officer of the 8th Marines, reached Shoup's command post about 1400. Although he was now the senior officer ashore on Betio, Hall did not assume command. In his opinion, nothing would have been gained from such an action, for Shoup, "who was doing very well and was the division's selected commander, was in a position to know more about what was going on ashore. . . ."⁴ The senior colonel aided his junior by placing his own communications equipment at Shoup's disposal.

EXPANDING THE BEACHHEAD

Colonel Shoup's plan for the second day called for 1/8 to fight its way westward toward the Red 1 beachhead, while 1/2 and 2/2 drove across the island. Crowe's 2/8 was to reduce

the enemy pocket at the base of Burns-Philp pier, and 3/2 was given the task of securing Green Beach. By 1200, Hays had his battalion ready to launch its thrust. His unit relieved the composite force that was holding the western segment of the beachhead and, with the aid of a medium tank, attempted to forge ahead. This lone tank could not shatter all the fortifications in the path of 1/8, and the attackers were unable to gain momentum. The battalion made little progress, killed few Japanese, and suffered light casualties, for the troops lacked the tools with which to destroy Japanese positions. "Hays had no flame-throwers, the most important weapon we had on Tarawa," commented his regimental commander, "and without them a unit had little chance to advance."⁵ At dark the Marines paused, ready to continue the attack on the following morning.

The task assigned Major Kyle's 1/2 on the morning of the second day was to strike across the airstrip to the ocean shore. Two of Kyle's companies were located in the triangular area formed by the runway and taxiways, and the third was on their right facing to the west. Early in the day, the battalion commander had reinforced Company C, the unit on the right, with a platoon of water-cooled .30 caliber machine guns. In the meantime, members of Weapons Company headquarters had found a pair of .50 caliber machine guns on the beach. These weapons, manned by volunteer crews, joined the .30 caliber guns to give Company C

³The commander of 1/10 recalls that he "personally sited the two pieces in view of their being masked by disabled LVTs. We, of course, desired to use those LVTs as partial cover for personnel manning the sections as small-arms fire was sweeping across the area at the time." BGen Presley M. Rixey ltr to ACofS, G-3, dtd 10Aug62.

⁴Capt James R. Stockman, Notes on an In-

terview with Col Elmer E. Hall, dtd 10Jun47.

⁵*Ibid.*

still greater firepower. Neither reinforcements nor supplies could be sent to Companies A and B in the triangle, for enemy machine guns had been moved into position to graze the taxiway behind those units, thus isolating them from Kyle and the remainder of his command.

When 1/2 began its advance, Company C and Kyle's headquarters were prevented by the fire of the Japanese machine guns from crossing the airstrip, so the other two companies had to attack on their own. Assisted by elements of neighboring 2/2, the battalion on Kyle's left, Companies A and B reached the south coast. The Marines occupied an abandoned position about 200 yards long, a series of entrenchments that lay between two Japanese strongpoints. No sooner had the attackers gained the cover of the trenches than the Japanese attacked from the east, a blow that was beaten back at the cost of heavy Marine casualties.

Lieutenant Colonel Jordan, the observer who had taken command of 2/2 when Lieutenant Colonel Amey was killed, was not in contact with that portion of his command farthest from the lagoon shore. After runners had failed to return with news of these isolated units, Jordan reported this breakdown of communications to Shoup and was instructed to move his command post to the south coast of the island. Upon reaching the recently established perimeter, Jordan took command over remnants of three of his own companies, 50 to 75 men in all, plus Companies A and B of Kyle's battalion, an additional 135 Marines. Now that he had regained control, the com-

manding officer of 2/2 hoped to carry out Shoup's latest instructions—to join up with Crowe's 2/8 and form a continuous line facing eastward and stretching from the vicinity of Burns-Philp pier to the perimeter now held by Jordan's men.

Jordan soon realized that he lacked both ammunition and men to fight his way to the lines held by 2/8. With Shoup's permission, he postponed the effort until the following morning. Amphibian tractors carrying food, ammunition, and supplies reached the coastal perimeter during the afternoon, unloaded, and evacuated 30 wounded Marines.

In the meantime, Company C of Kyle's command had been trying to push across the island. The pair of .50 caliber machine guns managed to kill or discourage the Japanese gunners firing along the taxiway, the rifle platoons fell back from their positions on the right of Kyle's line, and, aided by the fires of the battalion machine gun platoon, Company C crossed the airstrip. By dusk, a stronger perimeter had been established along the south coast, with Company B and most of the recently arrived machine guns on the west, Company A and portions of 2/2 in the center, and Company C on the east. On both east and west, formidable Japanese positions lay within 25 yards of the Marine line. Since Major Kyle had arrived with Company C, Jordan, at Shoup's direction, attached the men from 2/2—who represented less than one sixth of the forces holding the position—to the 1st Battalion. Relinquishing his command to Kyle, Jordan reverted to his original role as observer, "having done," in Shoup's

words, "a fine job in the task he was assigned"⁶ without warning or preparation in the hail of fire on Red Beach 2.⁷

At the eastern end of the main beachhead, Major Crowe's 2/8 fought hard but was unable to gain much ground. To the left of the battalion position was the Burns-Philp pier, inland of which lay several ruined buildings, a steel reinforced pillbox, a log and coral emplacement, and a large bombproof shelter. The eastward drive made no headway against these defenses, nor did the Marines attacking to the south in the vicinity of the airfield have much success. Company E did reach the main runway, but the unit had to fall back to avoid being isolated from the rest of the battalion. At dusk, a patrol reoccupied the Burns-Philp pier, a structure which served as a sort of no man's land, and by the following dawn these Marines had killed 15 Japanese infiltrators at the cost of 2 casualties. In brief, the best that 2/8 could do was to strengthen its position and maintain pressure on the weary enemy.

The main beachhead, by dusk of the second day, extended from 400 to 500 yards along the lagoon coast on either side of the control pier. To the right of that structure, 1/8 manned a line running from the beach directly inland to the west taxiway. Neither this taxi strip nor the main runway were occupied by American troops, so a gap almost 250 yards wide separated 1/8 from the perimeter on the south coast.

⁶ Shoup interview/comments.

⁷ Jordan Rpt; Rpt of Capt Maxie R. Williams, n.d., in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs.*

This stretch, sandwiched between two Japanese strongpoints, encompassed a 300-yard portion of the coastline directly across the island from the base of the pier. The right flank of Crowe's 2/8 was near the middle of the airfield triangle, some 200 yards behind the left flank of the south coast position. From the triangle, Crowe's line curved in a quarter circle toward positions held by elements of 3/8 near the Burns-Philp pier. The Red 2 - Red 3 beachhead had been enlarged, but its defensive positions were marked by gaps which might be the target of enemy counterattacks and infiltration. (See Map 3.)

SUCCESS IN THE WEST

While the fight was raging for the central portion of Betio, Ryan's men, members of 3/2 aided by Marines from 1/2 and 2/2, were securing Green Beach, code designation for the entire western side of the island. Since the Japanese had a dozen anti-boat guns and a pair of 5-inch naval guns emplaced at the southwestern corner of this beach, positions that were protected by a maze of rifle pits, Ryan felt that he needed the help of naval gunfire in overrunning his portion of the island. A naval gunfire spotter contacted a destroyer lying off the coast and coached her guns onto Japanese strongpoints. Another destroyer joined the action, and at 1100 Ryan decided that the enemy was sufficiently battered to enable him to begin his attack. The Marines of 3/2, supported by two medium tanks, encountered only slight resistance. According to Ryan, his troops "got another medium tank,

and naval gunfire came from somewhere. . . . There was little opposition."⁸ Late in the afternoon, the Marines organized a defensive line that stretched across the island about 200 yards inland from Green Beach.

Ryan's success, called by Julian Smith "the most cheering news of D plus 1,"⁹ enabled the division commander to land elements of the 6th Marines without exposing them to enemy machine gunners. Although the 6th Marines had been released to his control, Julian Smith refused to commit this force until he had a clear picture of the situation ashore. On the morning of D plus 1, the general conferred with Colonel Maurice G. Holmes, the regimental commander, and outlined for him several possible missions which the 6th Marines might be called upon to perform. Holmes left the conference with the understanding that he was to prepare for any of these eventualities and await further orders from division. At 1230, while Holmes was passing on to his battalion commanders the instructions he had received from Julian Smith, he was told by division to land one of his battalions immediately. After reaching the southern part of Green Beach in rubber boats, this unit was to pass through the lines of 3/2 and attack to the east. In addition, Holmes was to have a second battalion ready to land in close support of the first. He selected 1/6, under Major William K. Jones, to make the landing and placed Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray's 2/6 in close sup-

port. Circumstances, however, upset Holmes' plans. The landing could not be executed immediately, nor did 2/6 remain available for close support.

At 1303, a message that was to alter Holmes' plans reached division headquarters. An unidentified observer, using the TBS circuit, claimed to have seen Japanese troops attempting to wade eastward from Betio toward the island of Bairiki. Half an hour later, Colonel Shoup sent a similar report to division and requested naval gunfire to prevent an enemy withdrawal. Before receiving this second message, Julian Smith ordered Holmes to land a battalion on Bairiki. The commander of the 6th Marines elected to use Murray's 2/6. Now the colonel had one battalion preparing to land on Betio and another getting ready to capture Bairiki. The third landing team, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth F. McLeod's 3/6, was ordered to embark in boats in the event it might be needed at either objective.

At 1655, while 1/6 and its supporting tanks were preparing to land on Green Beach, Murray's 2/6 gained the coral sands of Bairiki. During the approach to the island, the 15 Japanese ashore opened fire with a pair of machine guns. Neither naval gunfire nor preliminary air strikes had silenced these guns, but division, upon learning that 2/6 was under fire, ordered the planes to try once again. This last minute strafing run proved a spectacular success, for a bullet struck a can of gasoline in the pillbox that housed the entire enemy contingent and turned the structure into an oven. The Marines landed against no resistance,

⁸ Rpt of Maj Michael P. Ryan, n.d., in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

⁹ Smith, "Tarawa," p. 1174.

carefully searched the island, and found no live Japanese.

Getting ashore at Green Beach, however, proved a complex undertaking. Company B, 2d Tank Battalion, had the mission of supporting with its light tanks the operations of 1/6. The vehicles belonging to each of the tank platoons had been loaded in a different transport. The tanks had been stowed in bottom holds, and while the transports were unloading off Betio, the cargo within the vessels was rearranged in such a way that the armored vehicles were buried under a mass of supplies. Several hours were lost in digging out the tanks and lowering them into the waiting LCMs.

Nor was the experience of Jones' unit, the only battalion landed in rubber boats, much less frustrating. Just as the transport carrying 1/6, the USS *Feland*, was ready to lower the boats, it was ordered away from the reef into deeper water. Later this ship came in closer again, but it was still 12,000 yards from the beach when it launched the rubber boats. LCVPs towed the boats toward the beach, six of them strung behind each landing craft; outboard motors, which would have permitted the rubber craft to proceed independently, had proved unreliable. After the first wave was safely ashore on the southern part of Green Beach, Major Jones learned that the area was heavily mined and rerouted the rest of 1/6 to the northern portion of the beach. One of the two LVTs carrying food, water, and medical supplies for the battalion struck a mine en route to the island and was destroyed;

only one man survived. By 1835, 1/6 was ashore on Betio.¹⁰

Jones then conferred with Ryan, made a reconnaissance of his zone of action, and decided to attack at 2000 that night. In the midst of his preparations for this thrust, he received a message originated by Shoup and approved by division that directed 1/6 to hold fast until daylight and then strike inland. Upon receiving these orders, Jones organized his companies for the night and coordinated with Ryan concerning the next day's operations.

Unloading the light tanks from the transports had been difficult; getting them beyond the reef proved almost impossible. In fact, only one platoon managed to reach the island in time to support the attack originally scheduled for 2000. Potholes, treacherous currents, and a steep drop-off on the inland side of the reef caused the tank company commander to request permission to land the rest of his unit on Red 2. Division agreed, instructing the remaining two platoons to follow the west side of the long pier. The company commander complied, but it was the morning of the third day before all the tanks were ashore.

THE SUPPLY SITUATION

Lieutenant Colonel Carlson, who had acted as Colonel Shoup's liaison officer on D-Day, was to serve in the same capacity on D plus 1. On the morning of 21 November, Carlson left the divi-

¹⁰ Rpt of Maj William K. Jones, in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*; Col William K. Jones interview with HistBr, G-3, HQMC and cmts on draft MS, dtd 20Aug62, hereafter *Jones interview/comments*.

sion command post in the *Maryland*, obtained an LVT, and made his way to the central part of the island. He found Shoup at the latter's command post, located in the shadow of an enemy bunker some 30 yards inland on Red 2. Since Japanese troops still lurked in the interior of the structure, guards had been posted at each exit. Shoup informed Carlson that ammunition and water remained in short supply and asked Carlson to return to division headquarters with news of the fighting ashore. At this point, Carlson volunteered to help organize the handling of supplies, an offer which Shoup promptly accepted.

About noon, Carlson met Lieutenant Colonel Salazar, the shore party commander, who had first reached the pier late the previous day. Salazar and Major George L. H. Cooper, operations officer of 2/18, had been supervising beachhead logistics and trying to keep a steady flow of supplies to the front lines. Carlson now urged that LVTs instead of carrying parties be given the job of shuttling supplies inland. Standard landing craft would continue to unload at the pier, which was being repaired by division engineers, and the amphibian tractors would be used for runs from the pier to the units on the island. Each vehicle could bring out wounded on its return trip. Now Carlson faced the problem of finding the necessary LVTs.

From the pier, Carlson journeyed to the minesweeper *Pursuit*, where he explained to Captain John B. McGovern, USN, who was coordinating the movement of landing craft, the need for

additional amphibian tractors. The captain responded by making 18 LVTs available to the shore party. Thanks to the presence of these vehicles, the pier could be used as an artificial beach for the unloading and sorting of supplies. The items in greatest demand were loaded in LVTs and rushed to the embattled Marines, while the remaining articles were stacked on the pier.

Another important development was the return to the island of Captain Moore, the assistant division surgeon, who helped speed the evacuation of casualties. With Moore was Major Homer W. Sharpenberg, an engineer assigned the task of locating the water reservoir known to be on the island. Sharpenberg found this source of water on Red 2, not far from Shoup's command post. Later, water purification equipment was installed and by D plus 3, the reservoir had become the principal source of drinking water for the Marines ashore.

After his conversation with McGovern, Carlson reported to Colonel Edson, division chief of staff, to add details to the picture which the officers in the *Maryland* had of operations ashore. Edson felt that progress had been good, and he sketched Julian Smith's plans for crushing the Japanese garrison. Two battalion landing teams from the 6th Marines were scheduled to land over Green Beach, while the third was to seize neighboring Bairiki Island. In addition, the division command post was to move ashore during the night.¹¹

¹¹ Rpts of LtCol Chester J. Salazar and Maj George L. H. Cooper, n.d., in *Rpts of 2d Mar Div BnComdrs*; *Carlson Rpt*; *Weatherwax Ltr*.

*WE ARE WINNING:
THE SECOND DAY*

At dawn on 21 November, sharp bursts of small-arms fire had served notice that the bitter action of the previous day was to continue with unabated vigor. Because the island had no terrain features big enough to mask preparations for a large-scale attack, ground was gained at Betio by small groups of Marines fighting from the cover of shell craters, ruined buildings, fallen coconut trees, or piles of debris. Often a unit was enabled to advance by the determination of two or three men who worked their way forward by fire and movement to a position from which they could hurl grenades into a bunker or deliver a sudden burst of fire into an enemy position. Engineers attached to the rifle companies tied together blocks of TNT and threw these makeshift charges into pillboxes. The men handling the flamethrowers slipped close to an enemy blockhouse and, while covered by riflemen, suddenly jumped up, ran to the entrance, and sprayed the interior with liquid fire. The riflemen then surged forward to mop up the position, and the flamethrower operator sought the nearest cover to get ready for his next mission. At Betio ground was gained a few yards at a time.

Such had been the fighting on the second day, but even as the Marines were battling across the island, officers of the 2d Marine Division began to sense victory. "At about 1230," recalled Colonel Edson, "things broke

rapidly for us."¹² The messages sent and received by Colonel Shoup on 21 November accurately trace the shifting tide of battle. At 1022, division asked Shoup if he had troops enough to complete the conquest of Betio, to which the colonel replied that the situation did not look good. Julian Smith's headquarters radioed for a clarification of this statement, and again Shoup was less than optimistic. "Situation ashore uncertain," was his evaluation of the battle. During the afternoon, however, the picture began coming into sharper focus. At 1345, the best that Shoup could offer was a hopeful "Doing our best," but at 1706 he radioed: "Casualties many. Percentage dead not known. Combat efficiency—we are winning."¹³

Colonel Edson reached Shoup's command post at 2030, obtained an estimate of the situation from the leader of Combat Team 2, and assumed the burden of overall command ashore. Edson's arrival meant some measure of relief for Shoup, who had been responsible thus far for all the troops on Betio. Almost isolated from division headquarters, handicapped by unreliable communications with his battalions, he had succeeded in coordinating the efforts of his combat team. Neither enemy opposition, failures in communications, nor the slow delivery of supplies could stop the Marines who struggled ashore on Betio, for Shoup

¹² *Edson Lecture*, p. 28.

¹³ CG 2d MarDiv msg to CO CT 2, ser no. 118, CO CT 2 msg to CT 2 (Rear), ser no. 134, CG 2d MarDiv msg to CT 2, ser no. 139, CO CT 2 msg to ADC, ser no. 148, CO CT 2 msg to LT 1/6, ser no. 169, CO CT 2 msg to 2d MarDiv, ser. no 198 in *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl.*

had infused them with the spirit of victory.

PLANS FOR THE THIRD DAY

Immediately after his arrival, Colonel Edson enlisted Shoup's aid in laying plans for the next day's attack. Their first task was coordinating air support and naval gunfire. They requested naval gunfire to work over the eastern end of Betio, starting on a line across the island east of the turning circle and the end of the main airstrip. The supporting ships were to slam their shells into the eastern third of the island, keeping 500 yards forward of friendly troops. Aircraft were to bomb and strafe the same general areas assigned to supporting warships. At 0700, ships and planes were to bombard their assigned target areas for 20 minutes, a pounding which was to be repeated at 0830, 0930, and 1030.

Edson next turned his attention to Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth McLeod's 3/6 which had been waiting in landing boats at the line of departure since 1600 of the second afternoon. Shoup's command post was in contact with division, but neither Combat Team 2 nor division was in direct contact with McLeod's battalion or with Jones' 1/6. To reach either landing team it was necessary to contact the headquarters of the 6th Marines and have the message relayed. Edson set to work establishing communications with 1/6 so that it could fight under Shoup's control, at least until more elements of the 6th Marines were ashore on Betio. Edson also recommended that McLeod's men land over Green Beach at 0800. Division accepted Edson's advice, 3/6

was ordered to a rendezvous area, but Julian Smith's headquarters finally decided that the battalion would land on Shoup's order.

After consulting with Colonel Shoup, Edson issued verbal orders for the attack of 22 November. Since Edson could not communicate directly with Jones at this time, he was forced to rely on a messenger. His choice to deliver the message to 1/6 was Major Tompkins, assistant division operations officer.

Plans for the third day of the Betio operation had to take into account the disposition of the troops ashore on the island. On Green Beach, at the western end of the battlefield, were Jones' 1/6 and the composite unit which had secured this area the day before. These troops were in position to advance eastward toward the central beachhead, where three battalions of the 8th Marines and two battalions of the 2d Marines manned the American line. Nearest the troops on Green Beach was Hays' 1/8, which faced westward from positions that extended from the lagoon coast to the western taxiway. No Marines were posted on the runway to the left of 1/8, but 1/2 and a fragment of 2/2 occupied a perimeter on the south coast inland of the pier. Another gap lay between the left flank of this perimeter and the line held by 2/8 and 3/8. The final portion of the beachhead curved from the center of the airfield triangle to the Burns-Philp pier. Strong Japanese fortifications lay at the juncture of Red 1 and Red 2 between Ryan's troops and those led by Hays, on either end of the south coast perimeter, and inland from the Burns-Philp pier.

The attack order for the morning of 22 November called for 1/6 to pass through 3/2 and strike eastward from Green Beach along the south shore in order to establish contact with Kyle's command. What time this assault got underway would depend upon the speed with which Tompkins could reach the battalion command post. At daylight, Hays' 1/8 was to attack to the west along the lagoon shore to eliminate the pocket of resistance astride the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. Meanwhile, Colonel Hall, with the other two battalions of the 8th Marines, was to continue the drive toward the east, shattering in the process the defenses that had contained Major Crowe's battalion.

In addition to ordering air and naval gunfire support for the morning of 22 November, the 2d Marine Division prepared to augment the fires of its artillery already on Betio by emplacing batteries on neighboring Bairiki. As soon as Murray reported that 2/6 had landed successfully, division headquarters instructed Colonel Holmes to send the artillery element of his combat team, 2/10 (less Battery D), ashore on Bairiki early the next morning. Holmes then directed the artillery battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel George R. E. Shell, to start transferring his men and equipment to boats by 0330, 22 November, and to land on Bairiki.

At 0300, 2/10 began loading into LCVPs, but this work was suddenly interrupted by an air alert which sent the transports steaming out to sea. At the time of the alert, Battery E was fully loaded, and a portion of Headquarters and Service Battery was

boated. Leaving the troops in the transports to come ashore when those vessels returned, the boats already loaded moved directly to Bairiki, arriving off the designated beach at about 0630. Immediately after landing, Battery E dropped trails and, with the aid of the fire direction center on Betio, began registering on the larger island.¹⁴ The transports returned to their unloading area at 0700, but it was noon before Battery F and the rest of the Headquarters and Service Battery reached Bairiki. Battery D, which had been ordered to land on Green Beach at Betio rather than at Bairiki, found that hydrographic conditions off its assigned beach were unfavorable to the landing of artillery. In order to get the howitzers of the battery into action as quickly as possible, division ordered it to land instead on Bairiki.

THE ATTACK OF HAYS' BATTALION

At 0700 on the morning of the third day, 1/8 attacked to the west in an attempt to drive the enemy from strong positions on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. Company B advanced along the shore on the battalion right, Company A in the center, and Company C on the left or inland flank. During the morning the attack was supported by three light tanks which maneuvered into positions from which they could deliver almost point-blank

¹⁴The 1/10 commander noted that this procedure required his forward observer to adjust fires of 2/10 "while looking into their muzzles," an unusual situation that "had been foreseen, planned, and rehearsed in New Zealand during regimental exercises." Rixey ltr, *op. cit.*



SQUAD LEADER points out the enemy ahead as Marines crawl inland under fire at Betio. (USMC 63575)



REINFORCEMENTS, seen through the framework of a Japanese pier, wade ashore at Betio. (USMC 63515)

fire into the opening of the Japanese pillboxes that were holding up the Marine advance. The enemy positions, however, were far too rugged to be badly damaged by the 37mm guns mounted on these tanks, and the steel and concrete structures had to be reduced by hand-placed bangalore torpedoes and shaped charges.

The light tanks proved unable to perform their assigned task, and at 1130, after one of them had been put out of action by what was thought to be a magnetic mine, they were withdrawn.¹⁵ Two self-propelled 75mm guns from Weapons Company, 2d Marines, were ordered forward to support the attack. One of these half-tracks had its radiator holed by a bullet and was forced to retire before it could contribute anything to the success of Hays' battalion.¹⁶

Although little ground was gained, the men of 1/8 succeeded in destroying several cores of Japanese resistance. The best progress was made by Companies A and C, which outflanked the enemy position, while along the beach Company B kept unremitting pressure on the Japanese. Late in the afternoon the defenders of the Red 1 - Red 2 strongpoint attempted a minor and futile counterattack which was easily beaten back. As a result of the day's action, the enemy in this area were effectively isolated from their comrades. When Hays' men dug in for

the night, they held a semi-circular line reaching from the beach to the airfield dispersal area. (See Map 3.)

THE ATTACK OF 1/6

As late as 0505 on 22 November, Colonel Edson had no contact with Major Jones of 1/6. An hour had passed since Edson had issued his attack orders, and the colonel was anxious that Jones learn of his mission in ample time to make the necessary preparations. Edson asked division to notify the battalion of his plan, but contact between the two headquarters had been lost temporarily. Shortly after 0600, however, Major Jones was able to contact Colonel Shoup by radio and was told the details of the operation plan. Consequently, the battalion commander reported, his men were ready to go at first light.¹⁷

Colonel Shoup, under whose control 1/6 was operating, ordered Jones to attack at 0800 in order to clear the south side of the island and make contact with 1/2 and 2/2. Once this was done, Jones was to pass through these battalions and prepare to continue the attack on order. With three light tanks in the lead, Jones launched his attack on time, driving forward on a one-platoon front in a zone of action only 100 yards wide. Company C, the assault company, had its lead platoon about 50 yards behind the trio of tanks. Thus the infantrymen were able to protect the tanks from suicidal Japanese who might attempt to destroy them, while the tanks carried out their mission of blasting

¹⁵ According to Japanese sources, no magnetic mines were used but some 3,000 small contact mines were planted, mainly on west and south coast beaches. *Japanese Gilberts comments*.

¹⁶ Maj Robert J. Oddy ltr to CMC, dtd 11 Jun47.

¹⁷ Jones interview/comments.

enemy strongpoints. Jones kept his flamethrowers up front with Company C, where they proved useful in knocking out covered emplacements.¹⁸ Resistance, however, proved minor as 1/6 swept along the coast, and the battalion made contact with 1/2 at 1100. During this thrust, Jones' men killed about 250 Japanese, but suffered only light casualties themselves. Losses in the assault company were kept to a minimum by the effective employment of tanks and flamethrowers and rapid movement of the infantry. Given adequate infantry protection, the light tanks proved unusually effective in closing with and destroying enemy installations that might have delayed the battalion for several hours.

Just before 1/6 made contact with the Marines manning the coastal perimeter, Jones was ordered to report as quickly as possible to Shoup's command post. There he received orders to continue the attack to the east at 1300. With the exception of the Red 1 - Red 2 pocket, Japanese resistance on the western half of the island had been crushed. Since this surviving strongpoint was under pressure from 3/2 on the west and 1/8 on the east, it no longer posed a serious threat to the 2d Marine Division. For his afternoon attack, Jones was to have one medium and seven light tanks, the support of naval gunfire, and aid from field artillery on both Betio and Bairiki. In addition, the 8th Marines, except for Hays' 1/8, would attack in conjunction with Jones' battalion. Colonel Hall, commander of the 8th Marines, pointed out that 2/8 and elements of

3/8 had been fighting for two days to reduce the stubborn positions between the east taxiway and the Burns-Philp pier. He felt that these men were capable of just one more effort, and Shoup agreed. As soon as these two battalions had shattered the defenses that had so far contained them, they would rest while 1/6 and 3/6 assumed the entire burden of conquering the eastern half of Betio.

THE ATTACK OF 2/8

Early in the morning of 22 November, Major Crowe reorganized his troops for the day's attack. The strongpoints had to be reduced before substantial progress could be made. One was a steel pillbox to the left front, near the Burns-Philp pier and in the zone of action of Company F. To the front of Company K, a 3d Battalion unit temporarily under the command of Major William C. Chamberlain, Crowe's executive officer, was a coconut log emplacement from which Japanese machine gunners kept the company pinned down. The third position that impeded the advance was a large bomb-proof shelter, inland and to the south of the steel pillbox.

The aid of mortars and tanks was needed because the three positions were mutually supporting. None of them could be attacked unless the assault troops exposed themselves to fire from the other two. Crowe's entire battalion was to be involved in the attack. Company F was to strike first at the steel pillbox, then the next company would move forward, and the advance would be taken up all along the battalion front.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

At 0930 the mortars supporting Company K made a direct hit on the roof of the log emplacement, and fortune took a hand in the operation. The detonation of the mortar round touched off a supply of ammunition and the bunker exploded. In the meantime, a medium tank slammed several 75mm shells against the steel pillbox and Company F also was able to advance. The bombproof shelter, though, was a job for an infantry-engineer team. While riflemen kept the defenders busy, flamethrower operators and demolitions men darted forward. After an hour of bitter fighting, the Marines were clinging to the top of the structure.

As soon as the Marines had overrun the bombproof shelter, the Japanese counterattacked. The enemy's effort was smashed largely through the work of one man, First Lieutenant Alexander Bonnyman, who turned his flamethrower on the charging Japanese and drove back those not burned to death. The lieutenant lost his life as a result of this action, but he helped make possible the advance of 2/8.¹⁹

After this counterattack had failed, the defenders began fleeing the interior of the shelter, running out the east and south entrances. Those trying to escape from the eastern side were mowed down by machine gun and rifle bullets and grenade fragments. The Japanese who broke to the south ran into a hail of fire from machine guns and 37mm cannon.

As the attack progressed, Companies E and G moved around the north end of the bombproof shelter, while Company K moved up on the south, pausing in the process to touch off demolitions at the southern entrance. Company K made contact with Company E east of the shelter, and the enemy defenses were broken. For the time being, riflemen were left to guard the entrances to the bombproof, but in a short time a bulldozer arrived to push sand and dirt into the openings, thus sealing the doom of any Japanese still lurking within the structure.

The thrust of 2/8 carried it to a point at the east end of the airfield, where the battalion paused for fear of being fired upon by 1/6 operating along the south coast. In order to be completely safe from misdirected friendly fire, Crowe ordered his men to fall back about 150 yards. Even though forward progress had stopped, the men of 2/8 still faced the dangerous task of killing the Japanese that infested the area just overrun. At the east end of the airfield triangle, Companies I and L remained in place for the night, even though 1/6 already had advanced beyond that point. At dusk Company C of Jones' command took over the segment of the line along the north shore at the east end of the airfield, and Crowe's Company K was pulled back to form a secondary defensive line.

3/6 LANDS

Lieutenant Colonel McLeod's 3/6 spent the night of 21-22 November in its boats near the line of departure. Twice during the early morning of 22

¹⁹ Maj William C. Chamberlain ltr to OinC, HistSec, DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 18June46; Capt James R. Stockman memo to telcon with Maj William C. Chamberlain, dtd 17Jun47.

November the battalion received a change of orders. Originally McLeod was to have landed over Green Beach at 0800, but he was later told to rendezvous off the beach at 0800 and wait there for further instructions. By 0730 on the third morning, 3/6 was in position off Green Beach standing by for word from division. At 0850 orders were issued for McLeod to land his team on the north part of Green Beach, reorganize, and prepare to attack eastward. Although the reef made the landing difficult, by 1100 the entire battalion was ashore. McLeod immediately formed a line with Companies L and I, while holding Company K in reserve. At 1700, 3/6 began moving along the south coast, following the same route taken by Jones' battalion earlier in the day. McLeod halted about 600 yards to the rear of the lines held by 1/6 and remained there in close support of Jones' command. Early that evening, Company I was ordered forward to strengthen the forward position.²⁰ Much later that night, about 0340, four enemy planes arrived over Tarawa to bomb the island. One whole stick of bombs fell along the southern part of Green Beach, destroying the remaining LVT belonging to 1/6, but fortunately "the flamethrower supplies it contained were saved."²¹

In the morning of 22 November, General Julian Smith decided to establish his command post ashore. With the general and his 10-man command post group were Brigadier General Thomas

E. Bourke, commanding the 10th Marines, and Brigadier General James L. Underhill, an observer from VAC. After landing on Green Beach at 1155 and inspecting the troops in the area, the commanding general became convinced that he could best control operations from Red 2, where Colonel Shoup had set up his own command post.

The best route from Green Beach to Red 2 was by water via amphibian tractor, but even at its best the journey was far from easy. The Japanese holding out on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2 fired on the general's LVT, wounding the driver, disabling the vehicle, and forcing the command post group to transfer to another tractor. Not until 1335 did Julian Smith arrive at Shoup's command post to be briefed on the situation.²²

THE THIRD AFTERNOON

Orders for the afternoon's effort, issued by Colonel Edson at 1117, called for 1/6, "with all available attached," to pass through the lines of 1/2 and at 1330 attack toward the tank trap at the eastern end of the airfield. In the meantime, 2/8 and 3/8 were to continue their efforts to destroy the enemy to their front, while the 2d Marines, with 1/8 attached, was maintaining pressure on the strongpoint between Red 1 and Red 2.²³ During the afternoon of D plus 2, 2/8 and 3/8 bulled their way to the east end of the air-

²⁰ Rpt of LtCol Kenneth F. McLeod, n.d., in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

²¹ Jones interview/comments.

²² Rpt of BGen James L. Underhill, n.d., in *Rpts by SplObservers on GALVANIC*, Encl G to VAC AR; MajGen Thomas E. Bourke ltr to CMC, dtd 8Jun47.

²³ 2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl, no ser no.

field, and 1/8 helped isolate the Red 1 - Red 2 strongpoint, but the most spectacular gains were punched out by Jones' 1/6.

In order to reach Kyle's coastal perimeter, Jones' Marines had battled for 800 yards against a disorganized enemy. The men of the battalion were hot, weary, and thirsty, but fresh water was so scarce that only a small fraction of the command could fill canteens before the afternoon attack got underway. Although 1/6 had one medium and seven light tanks attached, only six of the light tanks saw action, for the seventh had to be held at the battalion command post so that Jones would have radio contact with the other armored vehicles. The enemy fought with his characteristic determination, finally stalling the Marines after gains of from 300 to 400 yards. At 1500, Company C was ordered to the northern coast to relieve a portion of 2/8, while Companies A and B dug in to the right of the runway.²⁴

By dusk on 22 November, the Japanese, except for those manning the stronghold on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2, had been driven back to the tail of the island. The troublesome redoubt along the beach boundary was effectively isolated. Marines from 1/6, backed up elements of 2/8 and 3/8, manned a line that stretched across the island at the eastern end of the airfield. As before, no troops had dug in on the airstrip itself, but the gap, in this case between Companies A and C of 1/6, was covered by fire. In spite of the day's progress, division

headquarters was far from optimistic concerning the possibility of a rapid conquest of the island. "Progress slow and extremely costly," reported the commanding general, "complete occupation will take at least five days more."²⁵ (See Map 3.)

COUNTERATTACK

The staff of the 2d Marine Division believed at this time that the entire 6th Marines would be needed to dig out and destroy the Japanese holed up on Betio. Colonel Holmes, commanding officer of the regiment, had established his command post ashore. According to the division plan, 2/6 would be brought to Betio from Bairiki and used to support a morning attack by 3/6. Both 2/8 and 3/8 were scheduled to be evacuated to Bairiki. The plan could not be carried out, for most of the available landing craft were being used to carry supplies, and the first elements of 2/6 did not reach Betio until the following morning.

While plans were being made for the attack of the 6th Marines, the Japanese, as Colonel Edson phrased it, "gave us very able assistance by trying to counterattack."²⁶ The first blow fell at about 1930, when some 50 Japanese, taking advantage of the thick vegetation east of the airfield, infiltrated the outpost line and opened a gap between Companies A and B of 1/6. Within an hour, the battalion reserve, a force made up of Marines from Headquarters and Weapons Companies had mopped up the infiltrators and sealed the gap.

²⁴ Rpt of Maj William K. Jones in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

²⁵ *2d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*, ser no. 206.

²⁶ *Edson Lecture*.



MACHINE GUN AMMUNITION BEARERS race forward to the front lines at the height of the battle for Tarawa. (USMC 64013)



FLAMETHROWER SMOKE rises above the top of an enemy bombproof shelter on Betio as Marines cautiously advance up its slopes. (USMC 63458)

To contain and destroy any future penetration, Major Jones asked Kyle, commander of 1/2, to set up a one-company secondary line 100 yards to the rear of the main line of resistance. Company I of McLeod's 3/6 later relieved Kyle's men, and additional ammunition, grenades, and water were rushed to 1/6. To disorganize the enemy and disrupt his communications, Jones arranged for a destroyer to shell the tail of the island to within 500 yards of Marine lines. The 10th Marines delivered harassing fire in the area from 75-500 yards in front of the battalion position.²⁷

At 2300 the enemy struck again. About 50 Japanese created a disturbance in front of Company A in order to screen an attack by 50 enemy soldiers on the position held by Company B. The defenders used machine guns, grenades, and mortars to blunt this thrust, but the attackers did succeed in learning the location of Marine automatic weapons.

About 0300, Japanese machine gunners opened fire from some wrecked trucks that lay about 50 yards in front of the Marine positions. Although 1/6 silenced some of the enemy weapons with its own heavy machine guns, three of the Japanese guns had to be destroyed by Marines who crawled through the darkness to throw grenades into the ruined vehicles. An hour after the firing had begun, an estimated 300 Japanese hit Company B from the front and Company A from the right front. Artillery fire from 1/10 was pulled back to within 75 yards of the front lines, destroyers

opened fire from the lagoon, and the infantrymen caught the enemy silhouetted against the sky. By 0500 of 23 November the attack had been shattered. Within 50 yards of the Marine foxholes lay the bodies of almost 200 Japanese, and sprawled throughout the naval gunfire and artillery impact area were still other corpses.²⁸

BETIO SECURED

On the morning of the fourth day, 23 November, the 2d Marine Division faced two difficult tasks, the elimination of the Red 1 - Red 2 strongpoint and the capture of the tail of Betio Island. The coastal redoubt was to be attacked from two sides, with Schoettel's 3/2, of which Ryan's group was a part, advancing toward the northeast, while Hays' 1/8 pushed westward into the heart of the enemy defenses. The final stage of the drive along the length of Betio was made the responsibility of Holmes' 6th Marines. Supported by medium and light tanks, including those which had fought with 1/6, as well as the flamethrowers from Jones' battalion,²⁹ 3/6 was ordered to destroy the 500 Japanese believed to be on the easternmost portion of the island. In the event McLeod's Marines were fought to a standstill, Holmes would have to call upon 1/6, because 2/6, originally slated to support the assault

²⁷ Regarding this supporting fire, the 2d Marines commander noted: "The destroyers really cut these people to pieces. . . . They really laid it in there . . . cutting across their flanks and putting the rounds where they count." *Shoup interview/comments.*

²⁸ *Jones interview/comments.*

²⁹ *Jones interview/comments.*

battalion, had not yet arrived from Bairiki.

McLeod's battalion began its attack at 0800, and for the first 200 yards of the advance, it met relatively light resistance. Company I, however, was stalled in front of a group of bombproofs and pillboxes located along the lagoon shore. The battalion commander, noticing a great deal of cover in the zone of action of Company L, ordered that unit to bypass the troublesome position and then spread out across the width of the island before continuing its advance. Company I was to remain behind to reduce the enemy pocket, while Company K followed in the path of Company L. (See Map IV, Map Section)

All in all, the attacking Marines had a comparatively easy time. Commented Major McLeod:

At no time was there any determined defensive. I did not use artillery at all and called for naval gunfire for only about five minutes, which was all the support used by me. We used flamethrowers and could have used more. Medium tanks were excellent. My light tanks didn't fire a shot.³⁰

At 1310, 23 November, 3/6 reached the eastern tip of the island, and Betio was secured. During this final drive, the battalion killed 475 Japanese and captured 14 at the cost of 9 Marines killed and 25 wounded. The enemy, though willing to fight to the death, was too tired, thirsty, and disorganized to put up a coordinated defense. Courage and determination proved no substitute for cohesive action; the Japanese were overwhelmed by Marines who displayed

teamwork as well as personal bravery.

While McLeod's command was overrunning the tip of the island, Hays' 1/8 and Schoettel's 3/2 were wiping out the pocket of resistance on the northern shore. Since 2/8 was no longer in action, Colonel Hall, in command of the 8th Marines, directed that the flamethrowers formerly attached to the idle unit be released to 1/8. Once these weapons arrived, Hays' battalion made good progress.³¹ Also supporting 1/8 were demolitions teams from the 18th Marines and half-tracks mounting 75mm guns. At 1000, 1/8 made physical contact with 3/2, the two units increased their pressure on the trapped Japanese, and by 1305 the western part of Betio was secured. Of the estimated 4,836 Japanese troops and Korean laborers who defended Betio, only 146 were taken prisoner, and a mere 17 of these were Japanese.

The men of the *3d Special Base Force* had died fighting to hold Betio. So great was the destruction wrought by the battle that few enemy documents of any significance survived. Most intelligence of the conduct of the defense by the *Sasebo 7th SNLF* was derived from combat observations and post-combat examination of the shattered and flame-charred remnants of the enemy installations. Somewhere in the ruins lay the bodies of Admiral Shibasaki and his principal commanders, silent forever on their part in the brief, furious struggle. The last word that Tokyo received from the island, a radio message sent early on 22 November read: "Our weapons have been destroyed and from now on everyone is

³⁰ Rpt of Maj Kenneth F. McLeod, n.d., in *Rpts of 2d MarDiv BnComdrs*.

³¹ Hall interview, *op. cit.*

attempting a final charge.”³² The enemy *SNLF* troops, so often called Japanese Marines, met their American counterparts head on in a bitter, close-quarter clash that was never surpassed for its ferocity on any Pacific battleground.

Die-hard survivors of the garrison continued to crop up even though the island was secured. Mopping up continued on the 23d and 24th. The dead were buried, and the weary Marine battalions organized a systematic beach defense in the event that the Japanese should attempt a counterlanding. The

island was in shambles. “The stench,” wrote a Marine artilleryman, “the dead bodies, the twisted, torn, and destroyed guns of Betio are things which I shall long remember.”³³ Later the Marine dead were buried in a military cemetery on the island where they had fallen. On this plot of sacred ground was placed a plaque which read:

So let them rest on their sun-scoured atoll,
The wind for their watcher, the wave for
their shroud,
Where palm and pandanaus shall whisper
forever
A requiem fitting for Heroes so proud.³⁴

³² Quoted from a Japanese report, Military Action in the Gilbert Islands, dtd 3May44, cited in Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*, p. 173.

³³ *Watson Ltr.*

³⁴ Smith, “Tarawa,” p. 1175. General Smith recalled that the author of these lines was Captain Donald L. Jackson. *Julian Smith ltr.*

Completing the Capture

JAPANESE RAIDS ON TARAWA

The beach defenses manned by the victorious Marines at Betio were never tested. Although the Japanese had hoped to respond to an American invasion of the Gilberts with an interception operation—a combined attack by aircraft, submarines, and surface ships—the swift capture of the key atolls made the enemy plans obsolete before they could be activated. The most important element of the counter-attack force, carrier air, was rendered impotent by losses of Rabaul early in November. Little choice was left the Japanese but to turn their attention from the Gilberts to the Marshalls.¹ All that the enemy could send to aid the defenders of Betio and Makin was a few planes and submarines to stage harassing attacks against the task forces of Admirals Turner and Hill.

On the afternoon of D-Day at Betio, after the invasion ships had been alerted to expect an aerial attack, a single plane winged toward the fleet at an altitude of about 300 feet. Anti-aircraft gunners opened fire, and the target settled toward the surface of the sea. The plane was not hit, fortunately in this instance, for it was an observation craft from the *Maryland*,

carrying Lieutenant Colonel Jesse S. Cook, Jr., D-4 of the 2d Marine Division. After drifting throughout the night, Cook's pilot managed to taxi his plane back to the battleship.²

Just before dawn on 21 November, approximately eight enemy aircraft soared over Betio, dropped a few bombs, and returned to their base. Four planes bombed the island on the following morning, but again the Japanese aviators ignored Admiral Hill's shipping. The task force, however, remained on the alert for a major aerial attack from either Mille or Maloelap in the southern Marshalls. (See Map 7.)

The gravest threat to the transports came not from planes but from submarines. At noon on 22 November, the destroyer USS *Gansevoort* reported a contact with a submarine to the west of the transports. Other contacts with this marauder were made during the afternoon, but not until 1627 was its position fixed. The destroyers *Meade* and *Frazier* took over from the *Gansevoort*, dropping depth charges until the enemy was forced to surface. Shells from the *Meade* and *Frazier* burst around the damaged raider. Finally, the impatient *Frazier* rammed the submarine, sending her plummeting to the bottom. The few Japanese who

¹ Hattori, *Complete History*, vol. 3, pp. 59, 68.

² Col Jesse S. Cook, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 11 Jun47.

survived to be taken prisoner identified the doomed vessel as the *I-35*.³

Aside from these few incidents of support, the enemy left the defense of Tarawa to the hopelessly cut-off garrison. What success the aerial and undersea counterattacks had was gained at Makin.

MAKIN TAKEN ⁴

At Makin, the fire support ships began launching spotter planes at 0540 on 20 November, while Admiral Turner's attack force was about three miles from the island. The transports carrying the 6,472 assault troops of the 165th RCT slipped into their designated area at 0601 and began lowering their LCVPs and debarking soldiers within a few minutes. While the landing craft were rapidly filling with men and weapons in the gathering light, carrier aircraft struck targets on Butaritari Island. At 0640, the naval support ships began firing a preparation that lasted until 0824, by which time the island was hidden in a haze of dust and smoke.

As the waves of assault troops of the 165th Infantry were forming off the western end of Butaritari, the only Marine unit to fight at Makin was making a preliminary landing. The 4th Platoon, VAC Reconnaissance Company, along with a rifle platoon and a machine gun squad from the 165th,

occupied Kotabu, a reef-fringed islet that guarded the entrance to the atoll lagoon. Although this effort was unopposed, the Marines later saw action on 21 and 22 November when they assisted in the mop up on Butaritari.⁵ (See Map 4.)

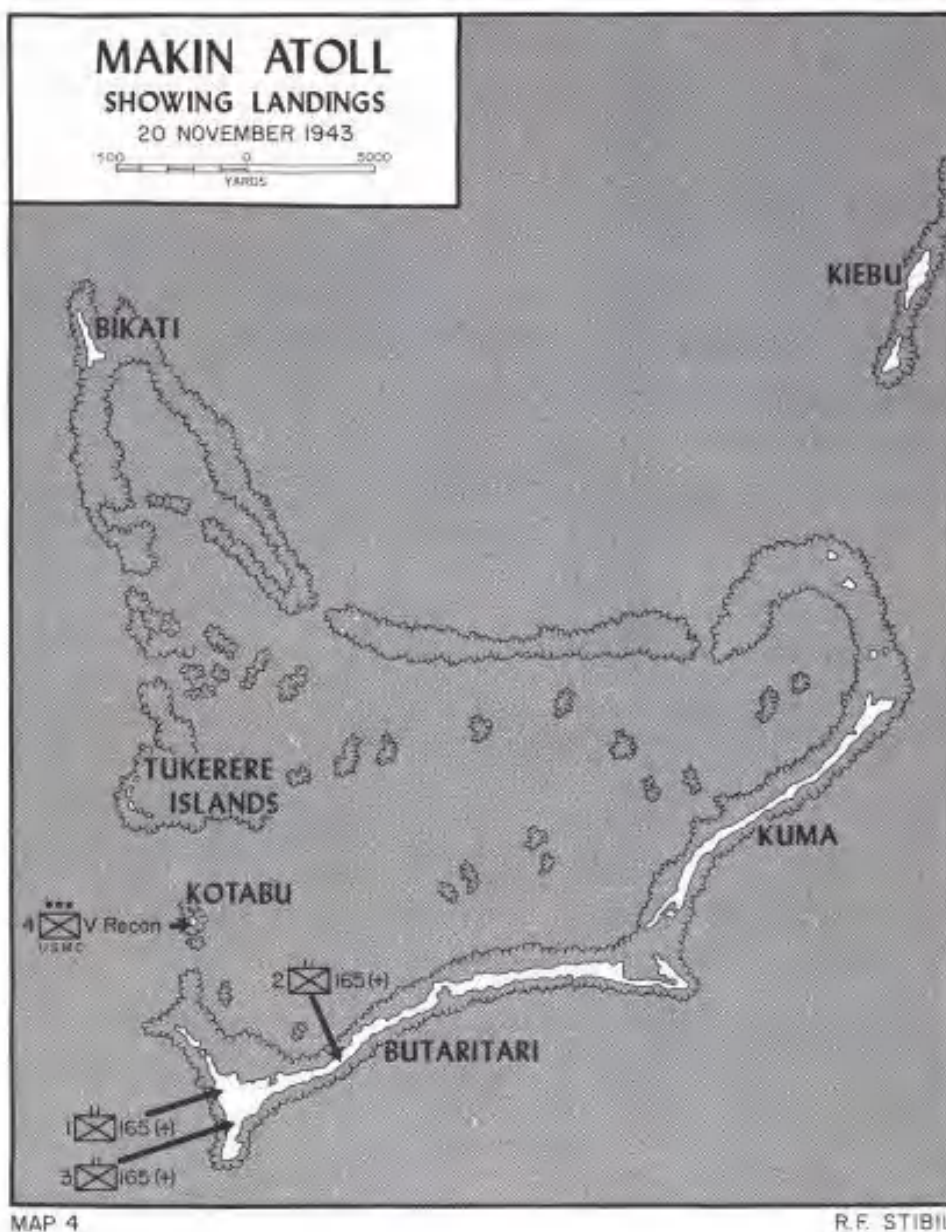
General Ralph Smith had been able to obtain the LVTs he wanted to spearhead the assault landing at Makin, although they arrived in the Hawaiian Islands only 13 days before their LST transports were due to sail for the target. Forty-eight tractors, manned by a provisional company from the 193d Tank Battalion, and loaded with men of the 3d Battalion, 105th Infantry, made up the first wave. Off the western beaches, 32 LVTs, formed in two inverted Vs, led the landing craft carrying the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 165th Infantry into the silent shore. The preliminary bombardment by air and naval guns had ripped apart the vegetation in the landing area and discouraged any attempt to meet the Americans on the beaches. Instead, the Japanese commander chose to remain in the area around King's Wharf, guarded on each flank by a cross-island tank trap and barricade.

It was fortunate that the Japanese did not contest the landing. Although the LVTs carrying the assault detachments of 3/105 landed without undue difficulty, the following LCVPs and LCMs were often unable to reach the shore across the reef, which was studded with coral rocks and potholes. Many men had to wade to the beach, and

³ CinCPac WarD, Nov43, Anx E, pp. 13-14 (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC); USS *Gansevoort* AR, 17-26Nov43, dtd 3Dec43.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the material for this section was derived from: Cowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*.

⁵ Rpt of 1stLt Harvey C. Weeks, n.d., Encl D to VAC G-2 Rpt, dtd 8Dec43, Encl C to VAC AR.



the waterproofed tanks which accompanied the infantry were taxed to their limit to reach land through the surging swells.

An innovation, rocket fire by some of the assault LVTs, was tried at Makin. Designed to neutralize beach defenses, the launchers mounted on the tractors were far from successful. Most of the rockets fell short, exploding harmlessly in the surf, and many never fired at all because of defects in their firing mechanisms caused by sea water. Machine guns on the tractors provided close-in suppressive fire as the first waves came ashore at 0832.⁶

Only scattered sniper fire met the first assault troops, and the confusion arising from the late arrival of infantrymen and tanks negotiating the rock-strewn reef and beaches had little effect on the course of operations. By 1000, the western end of Butaritari was secured, and the 1st battalion of the 165th advanced toward the western tank trap encountered increasing resistance as it approached the main Japanese position.

While 1/165 was moving toward the enemy, the second landing planned by Ralph Smith was taking place. Moving through the lagoon entrance in columns of LVTs and landing craft, 2/165, reinforced by a 3/105 assault detachment, turned and headed in for beaches which gave entrance to the heart of the Japanese prepared positions. Naval gunfire and carrier air hit

the island where the 2d Battalion was headed, and the 16 tractors made for shore with machine guns firing and landed at 1040. Behind them, the tanks and infantry in following waves found the water too shallow to proceed in boats and had to wade across the reef shelf about 300 yards to the beaches.

For the rest of the day, the troops which had landed on the lagoon side tangled at close quarters with small, determined enemy groups that held up any appreciable advance. Across the western tank trap, the men of the 1st Battalion of the 165th, whose regimental commander was killed in the fighting, were stalled by the fire of enemy machine gunners and riflemen. At nightfall, the troops dug in in close contact with the Japanese. What followed in the darkness was a harrowing experience for the American soldiers, as infiltrators and trigger-happy green troops filled the night with grenade explosions and rifle and machine gun fire.

Ruefully wiser in the ways of the Japanese in night combat, the men of the 165th spent most of 21 November consolidating their beachheads, all the while so closely enmeshed with the Japanese defenders that naval gunfire, air, and supporting 105s, which had landed on D-Day, could furnish little effective support. Much of the day's fighting, during which the two elements of the RCT joined forces, was concentrated in efforts to reduce Japanese pillboxes and machine gun nests, much like those on Tarawa. Tank-infantry teams, working with flame-throwers and demolitions, cleaned out the stubbornly resisting Japanese naval

⁶ LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "Supplementary Notes on Makin Operation," dtd 2Jun 44 (File supporting *The Capture of Makin*, OCMH), pp. 3-4; VAC G-3 Rpt, dtd 11Jan44, p. 12, Encl B to VAC AR.



LIGHT TANKS and artillery wait their turn to leave Betio two weeks after the battle, while Marine transports and fighters use the rebuilt airstrip. (USAF 68045AC)



SOLDIERS of 2/165 wade toward the lagoon beach at Butaritari, as smoke rises from oil dumps hit by naval gunfire. (USA SC183574)

troops, but progress was slow. General Holland Smith, who landed to inspect the progress of the battle during the day, reported to Admiral Turner: "Enemy losses very heavy, own light. Consider situation in hand."⁷ The Japanese, however, were still full of fight and those few that survived the first two days now withdrew across the eastern tank trap to take up positions in the heavy vegetation on the long, narrow tail of the island.

With the situation ashore rapidly clarifying and the destruction of the enemy garrison in sight, Turner gave Ralph Smith permission to land troops on Kuma Island north of Butaritari to cut off any Japanese attempt to retreat. On 19 November, the 27th Division commander had requested permission to make a landing on Kuma on D-Day, but on Holland Smith's advice, the admiral denied the request for the last-minute change in the tactical plan. Neither of the senior officers wanted to make the subsidiary effort until the destruction of the Butaritari garrison was certain. On the morning of the 22d, a detachment of the 105th Infantry rode LVTs ashore on the neighboring island and found no Japanese, only a welcoming party of natives.

On Butaritari, on 23 November, the main effort was made by 3/165, in reserve since D-Day. Crossing the eastern tank trap without opposition, the battalion moved quickly into the brush, flushing a few Japanese and maintaining a steady, continuous rate of advance that brought them up to a prepared line of enemy defenses by

dusk. All night long, the Japanese tried to infiltrate the American positions and attacked in small groups to no avail. When morning came, there were 51 enemy dead in front of the lines of 3/165; the battalion had lost 3 men killed and 25 wounded. Sweeping on to the tip of the island on the 23d, the soldiers encountered no further organized resistance. At 1130, General Ralph Smith signalled Admiral Turner: "Makin taken. Recommend command pass to commander garrison force."⁸

Makin Atoll was captured at the cost of 218 Army casualties, 66 of whom were killed in action or died of wounds. Only one member of the *3d Special Base Force Makin Detachment* was made prisoner, but 104 Korean laborers surrendered to the assault force. The total number of enemy killed was estimated to be about 445, 300 of them Japanese combat troops.

The United States Navy suffered a far greater number of casualties in supporting the operation than did the Army units fighting ashore. On D-Day, an accidental explosion in a turret of the battleship *Mississippi* killed 43 sailors and wounded 19 others. Some 20 miles southeast of Butaritari on the morning of 24 November, the Japanese submarine *I-175* torpedoed the escort carrier *Liscome Bay*. Bombs stowed in the vessel exploded, and in 23 minutes the carrier had perished, claiming the lives of 53 officers and 591 enlisted men.

⁷ TF 52 NarrativeRpt, dtd 4Dec43, p. 21, Encl A to V *PhibFor AR*.

⁸ CG, 27th InfDiv msg to CTF 52, dtd 23Nov 43, in 27th InfDiv G-3 Rpt, Encl 5 to 27th InfDiv Rpt of Participation in GALVANIC Op, dtd 11Dec43, hereafter *27th InfDiv Op-Rpt*.

The battle for Butaritari made veterans of the men of the 165th RCT. They had met the test of combat. Thanks to the experience gained at Makin, these troops could be expected to make a greater contribution to future victories in the Central Pacific.⁹

OTHER TARAWA ISLANDS

The occupation of the less important islands in Tarawa Atoll began while the battle for Betio still was raging. On 21 November, elements of Company D, 2d Tank Battalion, the division scout company, landed on Eita, west of Bairiki, and Buota, near the southeast corner of the atoll, where an estimated 100 Japanese were discovered. Another part of the scout company went ashore on an unnamed island that lay about one-fourth the distance from Buota to the northern apex of Tarawa. Two days later, while 3/10 was setting up its weapons on Eita to support the Marines on Betio, the Japanese on Buota escaped unopposed to the north. By 25 November, elements of Company D had scouted the southern half of Tarawa's eastern side, but at this point the entire unit was recalled to Eita to prepare for a reconnaissance of three nearby atolls—Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana.¹⁰ (See Map 5.)

In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Murray's 2/6, which had overrun Bairiki, had undertaken the mission of

clearing the enemy from the outlying islands. Murray's men encountered no resistance until the late afternoon of 26 November, when the battalion reached Buariki, the northernmost of the larger islands of the atoll. At sunset on that day, a Marine patrol engaged in a fire fight with a small Japanese force. In spite of enemy harassment, the Marines held their fire throughout the night.

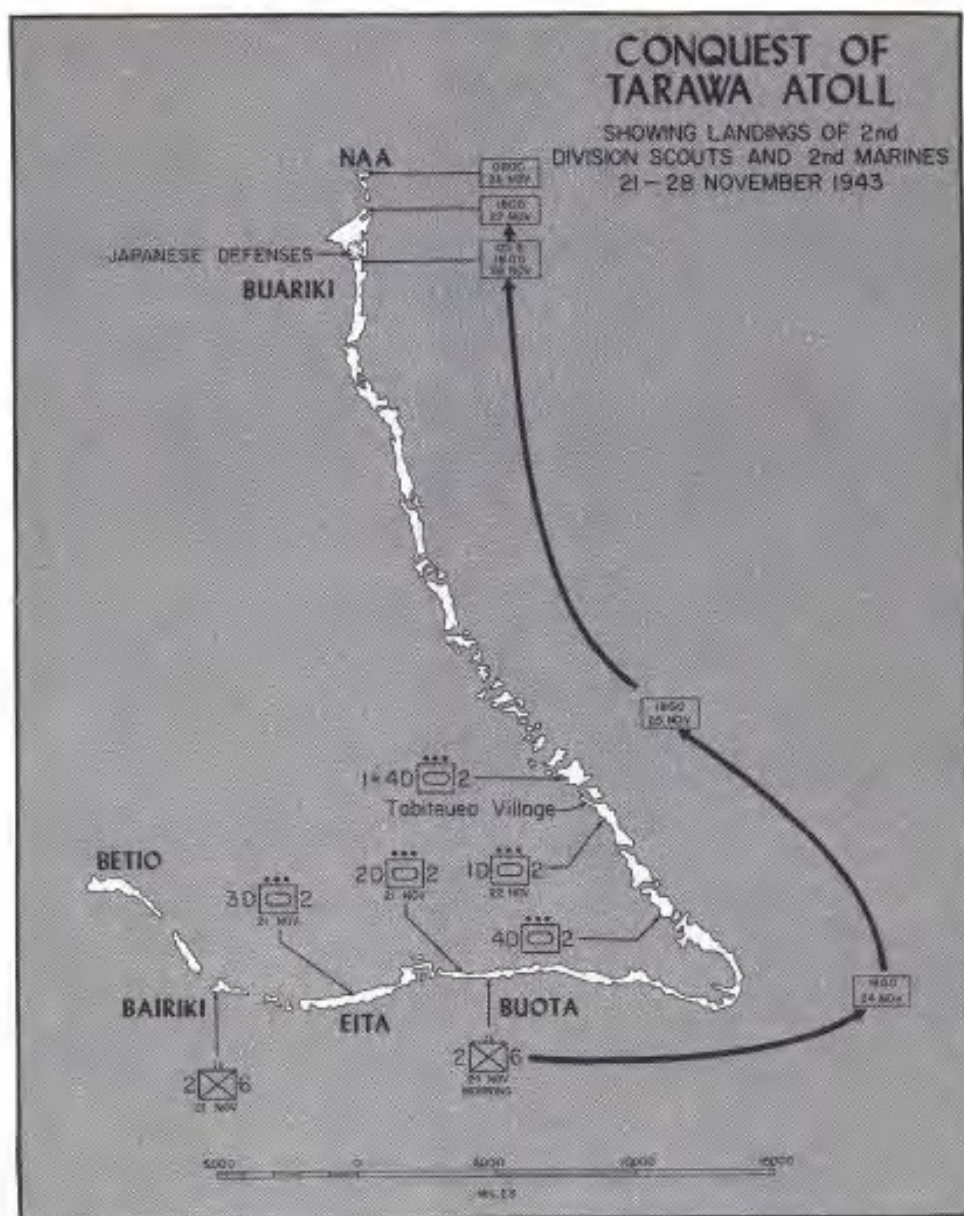
Murray resumed his advance on the following morning and soon located the enemy defenses, a haphazard arrangement of rifle pits and log barricades concealed in dense undergrowth. Because Company E had taken several casualties, the battalion commander ordered Company F to continue the attack while Company G maneuvered to strike the enemy on his eastern flank. Although Murray had a battery of pack howitzers at his disposal, poor visibility and the short range at which the infantrymen were fighting prevented the cannoneers from firing more than a single concentration. In spite of this absence of artillery support, Murray's troops crushed the position, killing 175 and taking 2 prisoners. The Marines lost 32 killed and 59 wounded as a result of this fight.

Naa, a tiny island north of Buariki and the final objective of the battalion, was found on 28 November to be free of Japanese. The men of 2/6 then returned to Eita to rest from their mission. By boat and on foot, these Marines had covered a distance of about 35 miles in moving from Betio to Naa.¹¹

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the operation to capture Makin, see Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 75-126.

¹⁰ Co D, 2d TkBn SAR, dtd 20Dec43, Encl to 2d TkBn SAR.

¹¹ 2/6 Narrative Account of Ops, 21-29Nov 43, n.d.



MAP 5

R.F. STIBIL

APAMAMA ¹²

In operations to seize the third major objective of GALVANIC, plans called for VAC Reconnaissance Company, commanded by Captain James L. Jones, to sail to Apamama in the submarine USS *Nautilus*, land on the night of 19–20 November, and determine whether the atoll was as lightly held as aerial photographs had indicated. Should Jones' Marines encounter any large number of the enemy, they were to break off the action and make their way back to the *Nautilus*. The objective which the company was to explore was a large atoll shaped like a partially inflated football and measuring 12 miles long by 5 miles wide. Abatiku Island to the southwest, which might serve as the laces of the football, was bordered on either side by a passage into the lagoon. Beyond South Passage lay Entrance Island, then an expanse of reef, and finally Apamama Island, which curved to the northwest then swung southward toward Western Passage and Abatiku. Apamama Island was broken by shallow water into six segments, each of which had been given a name by the planners of the operation. Those of concern to Jones' men were, in order of their separation from Entrance Island, JOE, JOHN, ORSON, and OTTO. (See Map 6.)

The *Nautilus* was to pick up the reconnaissance unit at Pearl Harbor,

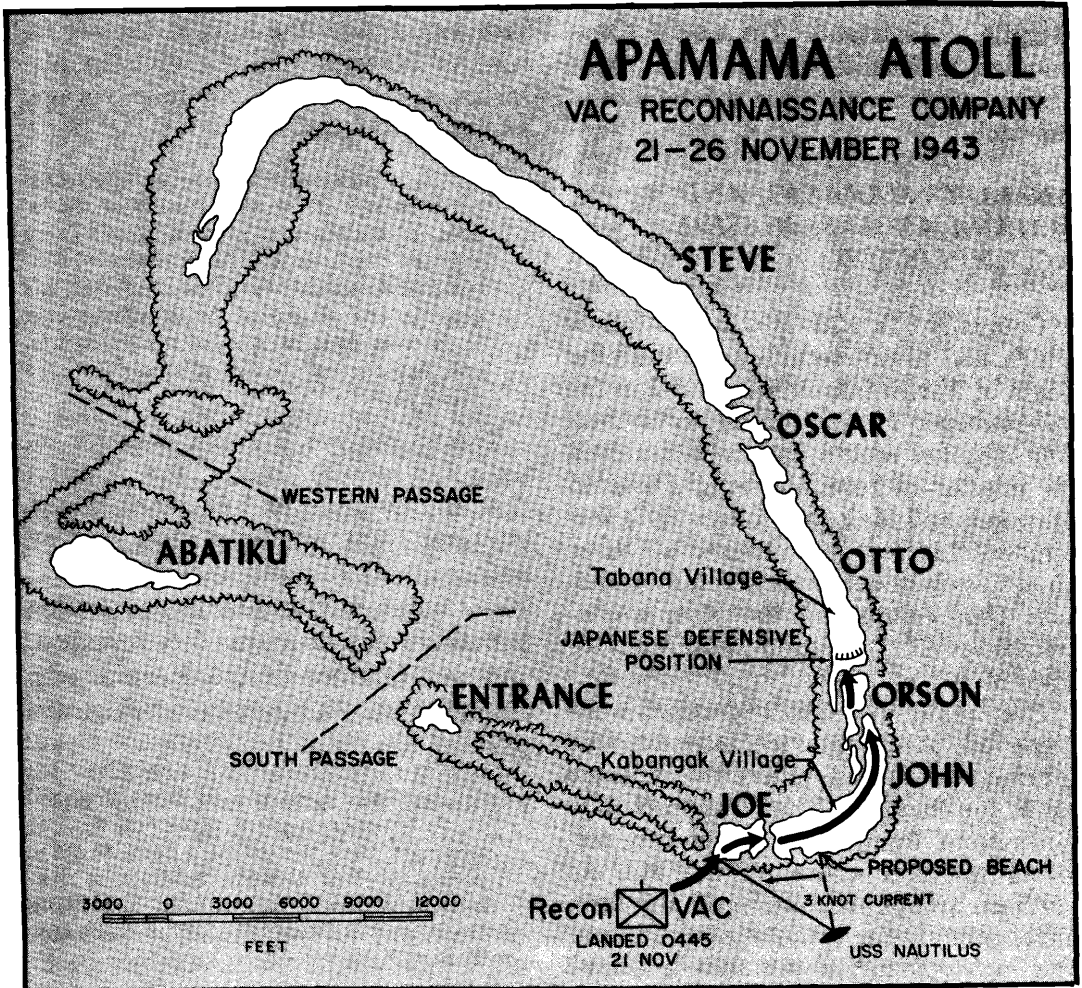
¹² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: TF 53 Rpt on Apamama Op, dtd 15Dec43; VAC ReconCo WarD, 8–27Nov43, dtd 12Dec43; Sgt Frank X. Tolbert, "Apamama: A Model Operation in Miniature," *Leatherneck*, v. 28, no. 2 (Feb45), pp. 26–27.

cruise for a time off Tarawa to observe Japanese ship movements, and then sail the 76 miles that separated Tarawa from Apamama. On 19 November, after departing from Tarawa, the submarine surfaced in order to increase her speed. The destroyer *Ringgold*, assigned to protect Task Force 53—which had received no word that the *Nautilus* was in the area—¹³ spotted the submarine, scored a direct hit with a 5-inch shell, and forced her to crash dive. Luckily, the shell failed to explode and the minor damage it caused could be repaired once it was safe to come to the surface. The submarine arrived off Apamama on the afternoon of 20 November.

Before dawn of the following day, Jones and his men embarked in rubber boats for JOHN Island. An unexpectedly strong current forced them to land on JOE, just to the west, but they later crossed to their original objective. On JOHN, the Marines collided with a 3-man enemy patrol, killed one of the Japanese, and prepared to move to the next portion of Apamama Island, the part called ORSON. After this crossing had been made, the troops encountered a group of natives who informed Jones that about 25 Japanese were entrenched at the southern tip of neighboring OTTO.

The company attempted on 23 November to move across the sandspit connecting ORSON and OTTO Islands. The fire of enemy rifles and light machine guns proved so intense that Jones decided to break off the action and attempt to outflank the defenders. On the following morning, while the *Nauti-*

¹³ Hill interview/comments.



MAP 6

R.F. STIBIL

lus shelled the Japanese position, the company commander tried to disengage so that his troops could enter the rubber boats, bypass the strongpoint, and attack it from the rear. The plan, however, could not be executed, for the Japanese kept firing steadily in spite of the bursting shells. Late in the day, a friendly destroyer arrived off the island to slam a few additional rounds into the stubborn emplacements.

A native reached Jones on the next

morning with the startling news that all the Japanese were dead. Patrols soon discovered that this report was true, for 18 of the enemy had killed themselves after the other 4 had perished in the bombardment. Marine losses in the Apamama action were two killed, two wounded, and one injured.¹⁴ That afternoon, Brigadier General

¹⁴ LtCol Merwin H. Silverthorn, Jr. ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 9Sep62.

Hermle, Assistant Division Commander, reached Apamama with 3/6 to assume responsibility for the defense of the atoll.

**ABAIANG, MARAKEI, AND
MAIANA ATOLLS: MISSION
ACCOMPLISHED**

Company D, 2d Tank Battalion, which had begun securing the outlying parts of Tarawa Atoll, embarked in the minesweeper *Pursuit* on 29 November. The division scouts had been assigned the mission of reconnoitering Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana Atolls. By 1 December, this unit had checked all three objectives without encountering opposition, thus completing the Marine contribution to Operation GALVANIC. (See Map 1.)

Even while these last operations were going on, the 2d Marine Division was moving to Hawaii, there to prepare again for combat. The 2d and 8th Marines went first on 24 November, followed in short order by the 6th, as garrison troops responsible to the area naval commander took over the defense and development of the islands seized by the Marines. On 4 December 1943, General Julian Smith turned over command of Tarawa to the Navy and headed for the new division base, Camp

Tarawa, high in the hills of the big island of Hawaii. As the division historian recalled the 2,000-mile voyage, he described it as:

. . . a postscript to horror. The transports reeked of the awful smell of the island, of disinfectant, and of blood. There were no fresh clothes for unwounded Marines, and almost everyone had lost his gear in the shuffle of battle. Every day there were funerals aboard the transports, and flag-covered bodies slipping into the silent seas.¹⁶

The 2d Marine Division casualty reports show the battle for Tarawa claimed the lives of 984 Marines and attached Navy personnel and that an additional 2,072 men were wounded.¹⁶ These harsh statistics serve as a lasting tribute to the courage, determination, and self sacrifice of the Marines who fought there. As a national magazine phrased it:

Last week some two to three thousand U. S. Marines, most of them now dead or wounded, gave the nation a name to stand beside those of Concord Bridge, the *Bonhomme Richard*, the Alamo, Little Big Horn, and Belleau Wood. The name was Tarawa.¹⁷

¹⁶ Johnston, *Follow Me!*, p. 166.

¹⁸ *Julian Smith ltr.* See Appendix H for the final official compilation of Marine casualties.

¹⁷ *Time*, v. 42, no. 23 (6Dec43), p. 15.

The Importance of GALVANIC

THE GILBERTS IN AMERICAN STRATEGY

To American planners, the capture of bases in the Gilberts marked the beginning of a major effort against Japan, the type of offensive outlined in the ORANGE Plans. The loss of Tarawa, Apamama, Makin, Abaiang, Marakei, and Maiana Atolls did not cripple the enemy, for GALVANIC had not been designed to do so. Although Admirals King and Nimitz believed that a victory in the Marshalls would be more damaging to the enemy than the conquest of the Gilberts, geographical considerations plus slender military resources forced them to strike first at the Gilberts. Both Nimitz, who was willing to undertake any operation that had "a reasonable prospect of success," and King, who was willing to accept "very considerable calculated risks," refused to plunge blindly into the mandated islands.¹

Not until bombers and photographic planes had penetrated the Marshalls were the American naval leaders willing to risk the ships and men necessary for amphibious operations in that area. The capture of airfield sites in the Gilberts brought the Marshalls within more effective range of land-based

planes and enabled the Navy to launch its westward drive. "This operation," commented Nimitz, "is considered to have been highly successful. Island bases essential to our advance across the Pacific were captured from the enemy with the complete destruction of all his defending forces."²

As a result of GALVANIC, the Army Air Forces gained four new airfields from which to launch strikes at targets in the Marshalls. At Tarawa, a 6,000-foot runway was built on Betio, while 7,000 and 4,000-foot runways were constructed on Buota. On 15 December, the first bombers, twin-engine B-25s (North American Mitchells), arrived at Tarawa, but neither of the two atoll bases was then ready to handle its full complement of planes. As the year 1944 arrived, heavy B-24s began flying bombing and reconnaissance missions from Tarawa.

¹ King and Whitehall, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 432.

² CinCPac WarD, Nov43, Anx F, p. 10. In regard to the decision to attack fortified islands, like Tarawa and targets in the Marshalls, rather than undefended objectives, Admiral Hill commented that prevailing trade winds required an island air base to have fields running in the wind direction and that the Japanese, recognizing this fact, had built their bases on the relatively few islands that were situated to take best advantage of the winds. Many of the undefended atoll islands were too small for airfields or would require too much construction work to be usable. *Hill interview/comments.*

In spite of swamps and soft ground, a 7,000-foot flight strip was finished at Makin early in January. Because this runway was built on sand rather than coral, it could not support the weight of B-24s. The Apamama facility, completed by 15 January, boasted 7,000 feet of hard coral surface ideally suited to heavy bombers.³

Although the bases gained as a result of GALVANIC were in themselves important, far more valuable was the experience amassed by American Army, Navy, and Marine Corps commanders. By capturing Betio Island, the men of the 2d Marine Division had proven that Marine Corps amphibious doctrine was essentially sound. Although the casualty list shocked the American public, the operation was nonetheless a success, for the capture of Makin, Tarawa, and four lesser atolls had neutralized the entire Gilberts group and advanced American might across some 700 miles of ocean. Because the loss of life was confined to so short a period, the impact on civilian morale was especially severe. Almost unnoticed was the possibility that a land campaign over a similar distance, even though comparatively few men fell each day, might in the end prove more costly than a violent but brief assault from the sea. GALVANIC, moreover, did show means by which losses could be reduced in future amphibious operations.

PERSONNEL PROBLEMS⁴

Because Betio was to be taken by a

previously specified number of men in what was expected to be a brief but furious battle, corps personnel officers were not concerned with a replacement system, which would be needed in a campaign of longer duration. Routine administration, however, had to be carried on as usual, and at Betio personnel accounting proved a difficult task. Breakdowns in communications, plus the hectic tempo of the fighting prevented the 2d Marine Division from checking each day on the number of able-bodied men in its ranks. Summaries of casualties and prisoners taken were submitted to VAC immediately after the action, but the confusion of reembarkation resulted in incomplete and inaccurate returns. To provide more thorough statistics in future operations, VAC urged that periodic G-1 reports be submitted as promptly as possible.

At Butaritari, where 27th Infantry Division headquarters was rapidly established ashore, two periodic reports of losses were prepared. Details of the Apamama venture, however, remained unknown to Holland Smith's G-1 section. No reports were submitted by VAC Reconnaissance Company until the unit returned to Hawaii.

Although GALVANIC represented a greater concentration of naval might than any previous effort against the Japanese, the size of the expeditionary force was limited by the number of transports and trained men available in the Central Pacific area. The 2d Ma-

³ Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, pp. 303-304; Morison, *The Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*, pp. 221-212.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the material in

this section is derived from: VAC G-1 Rpt GALVANIC, dtd 6Jan44, Encl E to VAC AR; Isely and Cowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 203-205.

rine Division, the only experienced amphibious division that could be assigned to the Gilberts expedition, was given the mission of capturing Tarawa. In order to lessen the risk of loss of valuable ships, the Marines had to assault Betio before landing elsewhere in that atoll. Had the American fleet been strong enough to accept the possible loss of several transports or warships, the assault force could have risked prolonging the action by first seizing islands near Betio and emplacing field artillery to support the storming of the principal objective.

In addition, one Marine regiment had to be retained in corps reserve, thus leaving only two regiments at the disposal of the commanding general of the division. In brief, circumstances forced upon Julian Smith a plan that called for the direct assault by an understrength division against a heavily fortified objective. Although he later was able to employ his third regiment, he could not count on its use and had to rely on aerial and naval bombardment to make up for what he lacked in numbers. The lesson was clear. In assessing operations to seize the atoll, Admiral Nimitz wrote: "Under present conditions, it is necessary to plan for the employment of not less than one division for the capture of an enemy position comparable in strength to Tarawa."⁵

Compared to the defending garrison, the force assigned to capture Butaritari was of overwhelming strength. Yet, in the opinion of both Admiral Turner and General Holland Smith, the might of

this reinforced regiment could not be dissipated in secondary landings on neighboring islands until Butaritari had been won. After the fall of the major objective was certain, the possible need for further reinforcements at Betio kept General Ralph Smith from employing his reserve battalion as he desired. Not until victory at Betio was assured, could the Army general carry out his plan to trap the remnants of the Makin garrison by landing troops on Kuma Island.

The operations against the Gilberts were the most damaging blows that could be struck against the enemy with the resources then available to Admiral Nimitz. The expedition, no more than equal to its task, was the largest that could have been mounted in the fall of 1943. The GALVANIC force, in comparison to expeditions sent forth later in the war, was small, but these few troops were able to shatter Japanese power in the Gilberts and open the way into the Marshalls.

INTELLIGENCE

American intelligence officers, working from photographs taken by submarine and aircraft, were able to locate almost all of the enemy's defensive installations before the operation got underway. If anything, the interpretation of these photos was too cautious, for several dummy gun emplacements on Butaritari were listed as containing actual weapons. Intelligence specialists, however, failed to foresee the adverse conditions off the beaches at Butaritari. Although the unexpected boulders and coral outcroppings there, together with unforeseen tides, compli-

⁵ CinCPac 1stEnd to ComCenPacFor ltr to Cominch, dtd 10Dec43 (OAB, NHD).

cated the unloading of men and supplies, these conditions had little effect on the assault landings.

A greater number of oblique photos, taken at irregular hours over a period of several days, might have given a clearer indication of Betio's regular tides, but no available information could have plotted the freak dodging-tide that occurred on D-Day. When traders and British colonial administrators familiar with the Gilberts failed to agree on tidal conditions, American officers were forced to use a consensus estimate in order to prepare their carefully drawn landing plans. While General Julian Smith felt there was one chance in two that standard landing craft would be able to cross the reef at Betio, he approved a plan that envisioned "a tide that would not float our boats across the reef."⁶

More thorough photographic coverage would be needed in future amphibious undertakings, but only prolonged observation could give a hint of the course of eccentric tides. Another partial solution to the problem lay in the use of the Naval Combat Demolitions Units that had been organized prior to the invasion of Kiska. Although the six-man team destined for the Aleutians was inadvertently left behind at San Francisco, Admiral Turner felt that a similar team would have been valuable in destroying underwater obstacles off Betio. In the course of the Pacific war,

these units, designated Underwater Demolitions Teams (UDTs), also were employed to collect last-minute information on the depth of water, approaches, and gradients off various objectives.⁷

During the 76-hour battle for Betio, there was little opportunity to collect, evaluate, and disseminate intelligence information. Most of the Japanese and Koreans preferred death to surrender, and the information provided by the few prisoners had no effect on the conduct of the fighting. At Butaritari, friendly natives confirmed preinvasion estimates of the size of the enemy garrison and its location. In addition, villagers on Kuma Island provided an accurate count of the Japanese in the area, information which helped General Ralph Smith prevent the enemy from retreating along the atoll. Most of the intelligence gathered in the Gilberts, however, was applicable to future operations rather than to the situation at hand.

After Betio was secured, Japanese language officers of the 2d Marine Division scoured the island in search of enemy documents. The most important find was a set of plans and specifications for some of the defenses encountered on the island. This document and the examination by engineers of shattered emplacements enabled the Americans to build sample blockhouses and test their durability. Such experiments led to improvements in naval gunfire techniques and infantry tactics

⁶ LtGen Julian C. Smith interview with Hist-Br, G-3, HQMC, dtd 4Oct62. For an interesting discussion of the development of tide information at Tarawa see: Patrick L. McKiernan, "Tarawa: The Tide that Failed," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 88, no. 2 (Feb62).

⁷ Cdr Francis D. Fane and Don Moore, *The Naked Warriors* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), pp. 24, 30-31.

in time for the Marshalls operation.⁸

Of the prisoners questioned by 2d Division intelligence specialists, only Ensign Kiyoshi Ota was able to provide valuable information. He testified that although air strikes had destroyed two or three protected installations, the men in shelters or covered fortifications were safe from both bombs and naval shells. In his opinion, naval gunfire had devastated antiaircraft emplacements, shattered communications, but failed to destroy concrete structures. The ensign, however, was impressed by the effective on-call fire delivered by destroyers posted in the lagoon. Since the building where Ota was stationed was destroyed by a tank-infantry team, his testimony indicated both the importance of coordination between infantry and armor as well as the need for a more accurate and powerful preparatory naval bombardment.⁹

COMMAND AND COMMUNICATIONS

The command relationships decided upon for GALVANIC satisfied neither Holland Smith nor Ralph Smith. Before the expedition sailed, the Marine general had pointed out that, although nominally a corps commander, he had no troops under his tactical control. The Army general felt that, since he had not been free to alter his tactical plans without Admiral Turner's approval until after the naval officer had

directed him to assume command ashore, the commander of the landing force was for the most part "a conduit for the issue of orders" ¹⁰ by the assault force commander.

Ralph Smith, however, was quick to admit that an amphibious operation was a type of combat in which the concern of the Navy for its ships might conflict with the scheme of maneuver ashore. Obviously, some sort of compromise was necessary. In the general's opinion, "the successful execution of an amphibious operation is dependent not on who or what component of the armed forces commands, but on the mutual confidence between all commanders and a comprehensive understanding of the problems faced by each." ¹¹ Apparently, there was no lack of confidence and understanding, for Turner's system of command was adequate to the situation at both major objectives.

The difficulty in transmitting orders and information rather than any weakness in the command structure caused confusion and needless delay at both Makin and Tarawa. Because there was little opposition at the beaches of Butari-tari, communications failures did not jeopardize the success of the 27th Infantry Division assault troops. Radio contact between ship and shore was reliable enough, but elements of the assault battalions at times had difficulty in exchanging messages.¹²

As a command ship for the Tarawa operation, the battleship *Maryland*

⁸ Maj Eugene P. Boardman ltr to CMC, dtd 16Jun47.

⁹ 2d MarDiv PrelimIntelRpt of Tarawa Op, dtd 7Dec43, Encl N to VAC G-2 Rpt, dtd 8Dec43, Encl C to VAC AR.

¹⁰ 27th InfDiv OpRpt, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*; Rpt of 27th InfDiv SigO, dtd 4Dec 43, Encl no. 2 to 27th InfDiv OpRpt.

proved an unhappy choice. Transmitters, receivers, and antennas, installed in a compact area, interfered with each other, severely hampering communication efficiency. In addition, the concussion from the 16-inch guns of the vessel ruined some of the more delicate pieces of radio equipment. Admiral Hill recommended that, as a temporary expedient, the number of radio channels in use be drastically reduced, but the problem of ship-to-shore communications could not be solved until specially designed command ships were introduced in the Central Pacific.

The communications difficulties extended to transports and landing control craft as well. There was an evident need for better facilities, better trained control personnel, and a more systematic command setup. As a result of lessons learned, the transport group, and later the transport squadron commander, "was given a greatly enlarged staff and made responsible for 'traffic control' off the beaches. With the better communications facilities made available to him, he was," in the words of the transport commander at Tarawa, "the logical one to be charged with this duty."¹³

Once ashore on Betio, the Marines continued to have communication troubles. Batteries in the MU radio, the handset carried by platoon leaders, wore out too quickly to suit the men who depended on these sets. Officers in the division complained that the TBX radios were susceptible to water damage, but VAC analysts held that the case containing the radio was watertight if assembled properly.

¹³ Knowles ltr.

Neither division nor corps, however, had a kind word for the TBY, and Admiral Hill's headquarters recommended that this piece of equipment be replaced by its Army equivalent. Waterproof bags or cartons also were needed to protect telephones and switchboards during the ship to shore movement. Because each used a different type of radio, contact between infantrymen and tank commanders was uncertain.¹⁴

TACTICAL LESSONS

The most important feature of the assaults upon Betio and Butaritari was the role of the amphibian tractor as an assault craft. Prior to GALVANIC, LVTs had been used to haul supplies from transports to dumps inland of the beaches, but the conquest of the Gilberts marked the first time that these vehicles had carried the first wave of troops. The tractors proved so successful in their new role that Holland Smith came to believe that LVTs were vital to the amphibious assault.

As valuable as the tractors had been, they were not perfect. Greater speed, additional armor protection, and a ramp for discharging troops were the improvements suggested by VAC.¹⁵ At

¹⁴ V PhibFor CommRecoms and Cmts, Encl A to V PhibFor AR, p. 62; VAC AR, p. 17; VAC Analysis of CommRpts, dtd 3Jan44, Encl 5 to SpStfRpts, n.d., Encl F to VAC AR.

¹⁵ Of the 125 LVTs used at Tarawa, 35 were sunk at sea, 26 were filled with water on the reef, 9 were burned on the beach as gas tanks ignited, and 2 were destroyed by mines on the beach. Eight tractors were put out of action by mechanical failures. Of the 500 men in the 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 323 were killed, wounded, or missing in action, including the battalion commander, Major Henry C.

the time of GALVANIC, an armored amphibian tractor mounting a 37mm gun, the LVT(A), and an amphibious 2½-ton truck, the DUKW, were in production. Even though neither of these types had undergone an adequate combat test,¹⁶ corps recommended that a battalion of armored tractors, two companies of the new DUKWs, and two battalions of ordinary LVTs be assigned each division in future assault landings.¹⁷

The fighting on Betio centered around pillboxes and shelters built of either steel and concrete or log and coral. Many of the flamethrowers which the Marines used so effectively against these installations had been made available by the Army Chemical Warfare Service detachment in Hawaii.¹⁸ In spite of the help of the Army, there were not enough flamethrowers at Betio, so VAC recommended that in the future one such weapon be assigned to each rifle platoon. In addition, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps agencies in Hawaii began cooperating in the development of a flame-throwing tank.

The Sherman tanks and the half-tracks, which also mounted high-velocity 75mm guns, proved effective against the lighter Japanese installations. Because the 37mm guns of the light tanks could do little damage to prepared fortifications, Holland Smith's headquarters recommended that these vehicles be re-

placed by the heavier Shermans. Pack howitzers, which had to be wheeled into position by their crews, were not as effective in delivering direct fire against pillboxes as were the more maneuverable tanks and self-propelled guns.

Demolitions had proved so deadly that corps recommended the issue of one demolitions kit to each rifle squad. Flamethrowers, demolitions, and armor had enabled Marine infantrymen to close with and kill the enemy by means of grenades and rifle fire. Grenades, in fact, were so valuable that VAC urged still greater emphasis on the offensive or concussion type. Perhaps the most important lesson learned was that the destruction of a Japanese garrison as skilfully entrenched as the defenders of Betio was a task that required teamwork as well as courage.

Because units tended to become intermingled during the amphibious assault, individual Marines might find themselves commanded by a stranger. Under these adverse conditions, the riflemen had to fight as part of a hastily organized team. In the opinion of corps operations officers, this kind of teamwork could only result from the self-discipline, resourcefulness, and initiative of every unit leader. Leadership, then, would continue to be stressed in future training.¹⁹

ARTILLERY AND NAVAL GUNFIRE

Had circumstances not forced him to do otherwise, General Julian Smith would have seized the islands adjacent to Betio, emplaced artillery on them,

Drewes, killed on D-Day. Information supplied by LtGen Julian C. Smith, dtd 15Oct62.

¹⁶ Two of the DUKWs were used at Makin Atoll.

¹⁷ VAC AR, p. 12.

¹⁸ Col George F. Unmacht, USA, "Flame Throwing Seabees," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, v. 74, no. 4 (Apr48), pp. 425-426.

¹⁹ VAC AR, p. 20.

and shelled the main objective before attempting to storm it. The need to capture Betio as quickly as possible prevented him from landing elsewhere in the atoll prior to the principal assault, but a study of the operation indicated the soundness of the original idea. Although Holland Smith's headquarters had no choice but to veto such tactics at Tarawa, the corps headquarters now urged that every effort be made in future operations to land artillery on lightly defended islands within range of the major objective.²⁰

At Betio in particular, great things had been expected of the preparatory naval bombardment. Representatives of V Amphibious Force, V Amphibious Corps, and the 2d Marine Division, had contributed their knowledge to the drafting of a naval gunfire plan. As a result of their combined efforts, a greater weight of metal was hurled into each square foot of Betio than had rained down on any previous amphibious objective, but the bombardment, awesome as it seemed, did not kill enough Japanese. The VAC commander noted, however, in his report on the operation that "without naval gunfire the landing could not have been made."²¹

GALVANIC taught naval gunfire officers that, when the requirements of a surprise attack did not preclude it, adequate preparation required days rather than hours of precision bombardment. To fire for two or three hours, much of the time shifting from one sector to another, was not enough. The sturdiest

Japanese installations, many of them dug into the coral sands, could be penetrated only by a base-fused, armor-piercing shell plunging at a steep angle. Instead of the armor-piercing type, comparatively ineffective point-detonating, high-capacity ammunition was used at Betio. Although the training and rehearsals for GALVANIC had helped, especially in the accurate delivery of on-call fire, still more training was thought necessary. A simpler and more effective target designation system needed to be developed.²² In the future, the officers of every supporting ship should know just what was expected of their guns. The ideal solution to the problems posed by the fortifications at Tarawa appeared to be the early arrival of the objective of thoroughly trained fire support units stocked with the proper ammunition, a deliberate bombardment designed to shatter possible strongpoints, additional shelling by destroyers and landing craft during the assault, and finally the accurate delivery of whatever fires the troops ashore might request.²³

²⁰ The naval gunfire grid and target designation system used in the Gilberts proved to be "cumbersome and inaccurate" at times. In future Central Pacific operations, the Tactical Area Designation system, developed by a group of Army, Navy, and Marine intelligence and mapping officers at Pearl Harbor, was standard. The new system, based on a 1,000-yard grid broken down into 200-yard lettered squares was readily usable by all fire support agencies. Col Cecil W. Shuler comments on draft MS, dtd 12Dec62.

²¹ VAC AR, pp. 16-17; Rpt of NavShoBomb, dtd 4Dec43, Encl H, and Important Recoms, dtd 4Dec43, Encl J, to V PhibFor AR; NGF Rpt, dtd 7Jan44, Encl 2 to SplStfRpts, n.d., Encl F to VAC AR.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²³ NGF SptRpt, n.d., p. 49, Encl A to TF 53 AR.

Because the preliminary hammering of Betio had not achieved the spectacular results hoped for, the importance of naval gunfire to the success of the operation could easily be underestimated. The 3,000 tons of explosives that blasted the island caused many casualties, disrupted Japanese communications, and enabled the first three assault waves to gain the beaches without meeting organized resistance.²⁴ Once these Marines were ashore, the enemy rallied to inflict serious casualties on succeeding waves. This seemingly remarkable recovery was due in part to the lifting of naval gunfire where the LVTs were some distance from shore. Out of the entire task force, only the pair of destroyers in the lagoon could see the progress of the amphibian tractors and time their fires accordingly. The other fire support ships halted their bombardment according to a prearranged schedule that did not take into account the distance yet to be traveled by the assault waves. To prevent the premature lifting of preliminary fires, Admiral Hill's staff recommended that destroyers take up positions from which they could track the incoming waves and thus keep firing as long as the friendly troops were not endangered.²⁵

LOGISTICS

The original logistical plan for the Betio operation, though carefully

²⁴ General Shoup, noting the few casualties in the leading assault waves, commented: "I always attributed this to a destroyer on the flank which kept firing and kept the Japanese in their holes." *Shoup interview/comments*.

²⁵ TF 53 NGF SptRpt, n.d., p. 49, Encl A to TF 53 AR.

drafted and based on previous amphibious experience, proved unrealistic. A beachhead was needed for the unloading of supplies and evacuation of casualties, but at Betio the Marines fought through the first day with their backs against the sea. Not until the long pier was pressed into service as a transfer point was there room to store or sort cargo. Even if space had been available ashore, landing craft could not have crossed the reef to reach the island. The carrying of supplies from the end of the pier, a point accessible to LCVPs and LCMs, to the front lines was best done by LVTs. Casualties were evacuated in the same vehicles that brought food, water, and ammunition to the embattled units. Wounded Marines were placed in the tractors and carried to the end of the pier where they were given emergency treatment and transferred to landing craft for the journey out to the transports. A naval officer in a minesweeper at the line of departure was given control over boat traffic, and the improvised system worked quite well. The Navy and Marine Corps officers responsible for beachhead logistics, when confronted with an unforeseen difficulty, had responded to the challenge.

The waters off the pier were usually dotted with landing craft waiting their turn to unload. This congestion was due to the conflicting needs of the Navy and Marine Corps as well as to the fact that supplies had to be funneled along the pier. The Marines wanted items landed in the order of their importance, but the Navy had to unload the transports as rapidly as possible regardless of the value of the cargo to the attack-

ing troops.²⁶ The longer the transports remained at the objective, the greater the danger to these valuable ships from Japanese planes and submarines.

In their eagerness to aid the assault troops, the ship crews were often too cooperative. As the commander ashore on D-Day noted:

In their enthusiasm, they did not load what I wanted, they just loaded. By the time they got a message from me requesting certain items the boats were already filled with other material. Tarawa made SOP [Standing Operating Procedure] that the Navy would not unload supplies except as requested by the landing force commander ashore. . . . Items that come ashore must be in accordance with the requirements of those ashore.²⁷

Although pallets, a few of which were used at Tarawa, were recommended for adoption, Marine planners pointed out that not all bulk supplies could be lashed to wooden frames. During the early hours of the assault, or when the beachhead was narrow and under fire, supplies would have to be landed rapidly and in comparatively small quantities. Once the beachhead had been won, these platforms appeared to be one of the best means of speeding the movement of cargo from the transports, across the beaches, and to inland dumps.

At Betio, supplies piled up on the beaches, for enemy opposition and a shortage of manpower prevented the shore party from functioning as planned. A single pioneer battalion

from the engineer regiment was not equal to the task, and the Marines from certain of the rifle companies, men who were supposed to be sorting and moving supplies, had joined in the fighting, leaving their work to be done by whomsoever the shore party officers could press into service. In the opinion of the corps G-4 section, the shore party machinery was in need of overhaul, for the pioneer unit was not large enough to do its work without reinforcement. Until the table of organization could be revised, Marines from service rather than combat units should be detailed to aid in the logistical effort.²⁸

The evacuation of casualties became increasingly efficient as the beachhead was expanded. On the first day, the wounded were placed in rubber boats and towed by hand to the edge of the reef where they were transferred to landing craft for the journey out to the transport area. Later, LVTs became available to evacuate the wounded to boats waiting at the end of the pier. Although the supplies of morphine, sulphadiazine, splints, dressings, and plasma proved adequate, the collecting platoons did run short of litters. At Tarawa, the doctors and corpsmen did a heroic job. The major recommendation to result from the operation was that hospital ships be assigned to task forces charged with seizing heavily defended atolls.²⁹

²⁶ LtCol Robert D. Heinl, Jr., notes of an interview with BGen Merritt A. Edson, dtd 26May47.

²⁷ *Shoup interview/comments.*

²⁸ G-4 Rpt, dtd 4Jan44, pp. 3-4, Encl D, and Rpt of TQM, dtd 30Dec43, Encl 8 to SplStfRpts, n.d., pp. 13-14, Encl F to VAC AR.

²⁹ Rpt of MedObserver, FwdEch, GALVANIC, dtd 1Dec43, Encl 6 to SplStfRpts, n.d. Encl F to VAC AR.

THE ROLE OF AVIATION

Both defense against air attack and the close support of ground troops were entrusted to carrier planes flown by Navy pilots. One force of carriers stood ready to intercept Japanese planes striking from the Marshalls. Other carriers protected the Makin task force and attacked targets ashore, while a third group performed the same tasks at Tarawa. Except for unsuccessful night attacks on the retiring task forces, the enemy offered no serious challenge to American air defenses.

Air support at Tarawa, in the opinion of both Navy and Marine Corps officers, suffered many of the ills that had plagued naval gunfire support. The strikes made prior to the assault accomplished little, for not enough bombs were delivered, and those dropped were not heavy enough to damage Japanese emplacements. On D-Day, because of severe communication difficulties, there had been poor coordination of the aerial effort with the progress of the assault waves toward the beaches. The planes scheduled to attack at dawn arrived late, and those which were to support the landing were early, their pilots unaware of a postponement of H-Hour. Although the beaches were strafed just before H-Hour, the attack was not effective, for the Japanese, who had taken cover in air raid shelters and pillboxes, were immune to harm from machine gun bullets. Later in the operation, while supporting units ashore, the aviators had difficulty in locating their targets.

These shortcomings indicated, among other things, that effective air support was impossible unless the pilots and

ground troops had trained as a team. Marine Colonel Peter P. Schrider, VAC air officer, was convinced that the division and its supporting carriers should train together for two or three days—the longest possible time at this stage of the war.³⁰ Holland Smith recommended that Marine aviators thoroughly schooled in the principles of direct air support should be assigned to escort carriers and included in any future amphibious operation undertaken by a Marine division. If this request could not be granted, he continued, the Navy airmen selected for the task should be carefully indoctrinated in the tactics they would employ.³¹

Air operations at Tarawa led to certain changes in doctrine, which would benefit soldiers and Marines storming other beaches. Unless dive bombers were attacking a particular target which might be obscured by smoke and dust, there was no need to suspend naval gunfire while the planes executed the strike. No danger of shells striking aircraft existed as long as the pilots pulled out of their dives at an altitude higher than the maximum ordinate of the naval guns. In addition, the practice of scheduling the final aerial attack in relation to H-Hour was judged to be unrealistic. Those planes assigned to maintain the neutralization of the beaches just prior to the assault should begin their attack when the landing craft were about 1,000 yards from the objective and continue the bombing and strafing until the assault waves were approximately 100 yards from shore.

³⁰ Rpt of AirO, dtd 6Jan44, Encl 1 to Spl-StfRpts, n.d., p. 2, Encl F to VAC AR.

³¹ VAC AR, p. 16.

Finally, since machine gun fire had proved ineffective against beach defenses, some sort of gasoline bomb was needed, a device which would insure that the defenses remained silenced during the last few minutes of the ship-to-shore movement.³²

Not only were important lessons learned from GALVANIC, but many necessary changes in amphibious tactics and techniques were made almost immediately. By the time of the Marshalls operation, for example, naval

gunfire would improve in both accuracy and volume. On the other hand, the war had reached the Marianas before effective coordination was achieved between air strikes and naval gunfire. As one study of amphibious warfare has phrased it, "Tactically, Betio became the textbook for future amphibious landings and assaults."³³ In the flames of Tarawa was tempered the sword that would cut to the heart of the Japanese Pacific empire.

³² Rpt of AirSpt, n.d., Encl A to TF 53 AR, pp. 58-61.

³³ Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, p. 251.

PART III

The Marshalls: Quickening the Pace

FLINTLOCK Plans and Preparations¹

GETTING ON WITH THE WAR

During the series of Allied conferences that resulted in approval for the Central Pacific campaign, the first proposed objective was the Marshalls. Because of the lack of information concerning these islands and the shortage of men and materiel, the initial blow struck the Gilberts instead. After the capture of Apamama, Makin, and Tarawa, planes based at these atolls gathered the needed intelligence.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: US PacFleet OPlan 16-43, rev, dtd 14Dec43; CenPacFor OPlan Cen 1-44, dtd 6Jan44; USAFPOA, Participation in the Kwajalein and Eniwetok Ops, dtd 30Nov4 (OAB, NHD); TF 51 OPlan A6-43, dtd 3Jan44, hereafter *TF 51 OPlan A6-43*; VAC Rpt on FLINTLOCK, dtd 6Mar44, hereafter *VAC AR FLINTLOCK*; VAC AdminO 1-44, dtd 5Jan44; TF 52 AtO A1-44, dtd 14Jan44; TF 53 OpO A157-44, dtd 8Jan44; TF 53 Rpt of PhibOps for the Capture of Roi and Namur Islands, dtd 23Feb44, hereafter *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; 4th MarDiv OPlan 3-44 (rev), dtd 10Jan44, hereafter *4th MarDiv OPlan 3-44*; 4th MarDiv Final Rpt of FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 28Mar44, hereafter *4th MarDiv AR*; Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*; LtCol Robert D. Heinl, Jr. and LtCol John A. Crown, *The Marshalls: Increasing the Tempo* (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1954), hereafter Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited are located in the Marshalls Area OpFile and Marshalls Cmt File, HistBr, HQMC.

As this information was processed, American planners prepared and revised several concepts for an offensive against the Marshalls.

Like GALVANIC, the invasion of the Marshalls was the responsibility of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, Admiral Nimitz. His principal subordinate planner was Admiral Spruance, Commander, Fifth Fleet and Central Pacific Force.² Admiral Turner, Commander, V Amphibious Force, and General Holland Smith, Commanding General, V Amphibious Corps, were the officers upon whom Spruance relied for advice throughout the planning of the operation.

EARLY PLANS FOR THE MARSHALLS

The Marshalls consist of two island chains, Ratak (Sunrise) in the east and Ralik (Sunset) in the west. Some 32 atolls of varying size form the Marshalls group. Those of the greatest military importance by late 1943 were Mille, Maloelap, and Wotje in the Ratak chain, and in the Ralik chain, Jaluit, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. Except for

² The Central Pacific Force was, at this stage of the war, also known as the Fifth Fleet. After the Marshalls operation, the latter title was habitually used.

Jaluit, which was a seaplane base,³ all of these atolls were the sites of enemy airfields, and those in the Ralik chain were suitable as naval anchorages.⁴ (See Map 7.)

In May 1943, at the Washington Conference, the CCS recommended to the Allied heads of state that an offensive be launched into the Marshalls. At this time, American planners believed that the services of two amphibious divisions and three months' time would be needed to neutralize or occupy all of the major atolls in the group and Wake Island, as well. The JCS considered the 1st, 2d, and 3d Marine Divisions available for immediate service and was certain that the 4th Marine Division, then training in the United States, would be ready for combat by the end of the year.⁵

After the Washington Conference had adjourned, the JCS directed Admiral Nimitz to submit a plan for operations against the Marshalls, and the admiral responded with a preliminary proposal,⁶ necessarily vague because he lacked adequate information on the area. Within three weeks after receiving Nimitz' views, on 20 July the JCS directed him to plan for an attack against the Gilberts, a move to be made prior to the Marshalls offensive. Thus,

* RAdm Charles J. Moore cmts on draft MS, dtd 25Jan63, hereafter *Moore comments Marshalls*.

³ VAC G-2 Study of the Theater of Ops; Marshall Islands, dtd 26Nov43, pp. 1-2.

⁴ JCS 304, Ops in the Pac and Far East in 1943-1944, dtd 12May44 (OPD File, ABC Pac, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.)

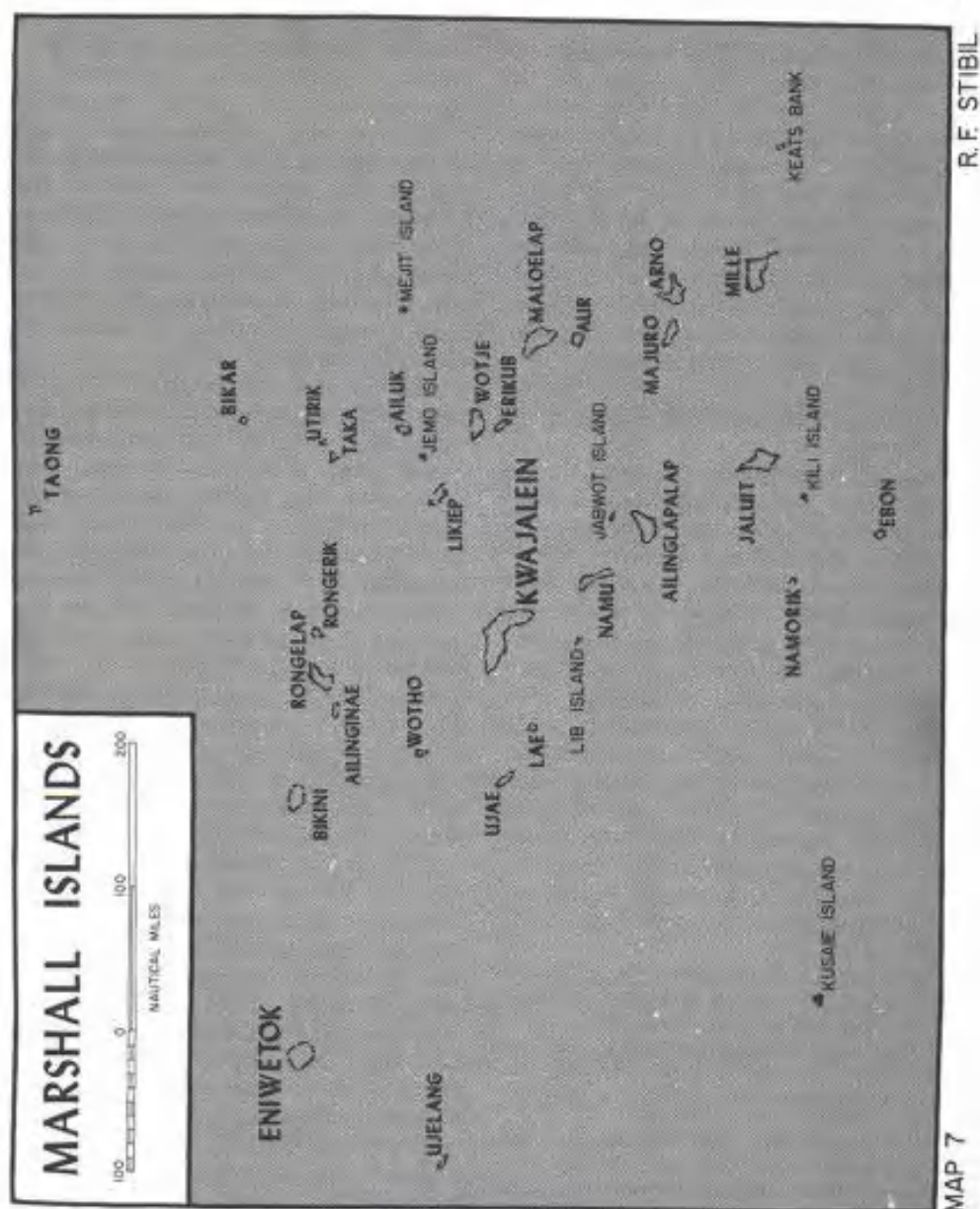
⁵ CinCPac disp to CominCh, ser no. 0096, dtd 1Jul43, referred to in CinCPac disp to CominCh, ser no. 00151, dtd 20Aug43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

early planning for the Marshalls coincided with preparations for GALVANIC.

By the end of August, Nimitz and his staff had carefully evaluated the proposed Marshalls operation. In their opinion, the United States was strong enough to undertake an offensive that would strengthen the security of Allied lines of communications, win bases for the American fleet, force the enemy to redeploy men and ships, and possibly result in a stinging defeat for the *Imperial Navy*. The attackers, however, would need to gain aerial superiority in the area and obtain accurate intelligence. A solution was required for the logistical problem of sustaining the fleet in extended operations some 2,000 miles west of Pearl Harbor. Finally, VAC would have to speed the training of the 35,000 amphibious troops required for the campaign. The proposed objectives were key islands in Kwajalein, Wotje, and Maloelap Atolls. Central Pacific amphibious forces were to seize all of these simultaneously while ships and aircraft neutralized Jaluit and Mille. Nimitz now requested specific authorization to seize control of the Marshalls, urging that "thus we get on with the war."⁷

At the Quebec Conference of August 1943, Allied leaders agreed that an effort against the Marshalls should follow the successful conquest of the Gilberts. Accordingly, the JCS on 1 September issued Nimitz a directive to undertake the operations he had recently proposed and, upon their completion, to seize or neutralize Wake Is-

⁷ CinCPac disp to CominCh, ser no. 00151, dtd 20Aug43.



land and Eniwetok, as well as Kusaie in the Carolines. By this time, the 2d Marine Division was committed to GALVANIC, the 1st to the New Britain operation, and the 3d to the Solomons offensive. As assault troops for the Marshalls, the JCS made available, pending the completion of its training, the 4th Marine Division and also selected the 7th Infantry Division, which had seen action in the Aleutians, and the 22d Marines, then guarding Samoa.⁸ See Map I, Map Section.)

THE SHAPING OF FLINTLOCK⁹

On 22 September, Nimitz handed Spruance a preliminary study in support of the course of action he had proposed to the JCS and directed him to prepare to assault the Marshalls on 1 January 1944. The study itself was not considered complete, so the objectives might be altered as additional intelligence became available.¹⁰ Because of this lack of information on the Marshalls area, Spruance began studying two alternatives to Nimitz' suggested course of action. All of these proposals called for simultaneous assaults, at sometime in the operation, upon three atolls, Maloelap, Wotje, and either Mille or Kwajalein.¹¹

⁸ JCS disp to CinCPac, dtd 1Sep43, Encl A to CinCPac disp to ComCenPac, ser no. 00190, dtd 22Sep43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

⁹ Originally, the Marshalls operation had been given the code name BANKRATE, but this title was abandoned early in the planning phase.

¹⁰ CinCPac disp to ComCenPac ser no. 01900, dtd 22Sept43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

¹¹ ComCenPac disp to Com VPhibFor and CG VAC ser no. 0053, dtd 10Oct43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

Although Nimitz on 12 October issued an operation plan for FLINTLOCK, the Marshalls Operation, he avoided selecting specific objectives. Within two days, however, he decided to employ the 7th Infantry Division against both Wotje and Maloelap and to attack Kwajalein with the 4th Marine Division and 22d Marines. He fixed 1 January 1944 as target date for the storming on Wotje and Maloelap and proposed to attack Kwajalein on the following day.

General Holland Smith's VAC staff now prepared an estimate of the situation based on the preliminary plans advanced by Admirals Nimitz and Spruance. The likeliest course of action, according to the VAC paper, was to strike simultaneously at Wotje and Maloelap, with the Kwajalein assault troops serving as reserve. On the following day, or as soon as the need for reinforcements had passed, the conquest of the third objective would begin. Smith's headquarters drew up a tentative operation plan for such a campaign, but at this point the attack against the Gilberts temporarily halted work on FLINTLOCK.

Prior to the GALVANIC operation, Admiral Turner had done little more than gather information concerning the proposed Marshalls offensive. Immediately following the conquest of the Gilberts, Turner's staff carefully examined the FLINTLOCK concept and concluded that Maloelap and Wotje should be secured before Kwajalein was attacked. Meanwhile, every planning agency in the Central Pacific Area was digesting the lessons of GALVANIC. Among other things, the theories regarding naval gunfire were revised.

As an Army officer assigned to General Smith's staff phrased it, "Instead of shooting at geography, the ships learned to shoot at definite targets."¹² After they had evaluated events in the Gilberts and assessed their own strength, Turner and Smith agreed that with the forces available Kwajalein could not be taken immediately after the landings on Wotje and Maloelap. Nimitz, acting on the same information available to his subordinates, also desired to alter FLINTLOCK, but in an entirely different manner.

On 7 December, CinCPac proposed an amphibious thrust at Kwajalein in the western Marshalls, coupled with the neutralization of the surrounding Japanese bases. In a series of conferences of senior commanders that followed, General Smith joined Admirals Turner and Spruance in objecting to this bold stroke.¹³ Spruance, the most determined of the three, pointed out that immediately after the capture of Kwajalein units of his Central Pacific Force were scheduled to depart for the South Pacific. Once the fast carriers had steamed southward, he could no longer maintain the neutralization of Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit, and the enemy would be able to ferry planes to these Marshalls bases in order to attack the line of communications between the Gilberts and Kwajalein. Spruance also desired to ease the logistical strain by seizing an additional fleet anchorage in the Marshalls. To

meet the last objective Nimitz included in FLINTLOCK the capture of a second atoll, one that was weakly defended. To cripple Japanese air power, he approved a more thorough pounding of the enemy bases that ringed Kwajalein.¹⁴

After informing the JCS of his change of plans, Nimitz on 14 December directed Spruance and his other subordinates to devise a plan for the assault on Roi and Kwajalein Islands in Kwajalein Atoll. The alternative objectives were Maloelap and Wotje, but whichever objectives were attacked, D-Day was fixed as 17 January 1944.¹⁵ On 18 December, Nimitz informed King that he had set back D-Day to 31 January in view of the need for additional time for training and the need to make repairs to the carriers USS *Saratoga*, *Princeton*, and *Intrepid*.¹⁶

The assignment of another reinforced regiment, the 106th RCT of the 27th Infantry Division, to the FLINTLOCK force increased the number of men available for the expanded plan, but Turner continued to worry about the readiness of the various units. On 20 December, he requested that D-Day be postponed until 10 February to allow the two divisions to receive the proper equipment and to enable the 4th Marine Division to hold rehearsals.¹⁷ No further delays were authorized, however, as the JCS had directed that

¹⁴ *Turner ltr I*; Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to CMC, dtd 12Jan53.

¹⁵ CinCPac disp to ComCenPac, ser no. 001689, dtd 14Dec43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

¹⁶ CinCPac disp to CominCh, ser no. 0236, dtd 18Dec43 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

¹⁷ *Turner ltr I*.

¹² Col Joseph C. Anderson, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 23Jan53, hereafter *Anderson ltr*.

¹³ FAdm Chester W. Nimitz ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb53; Adm Richmond K. Turner ltr to CMC, dtd 27Feb53, hereafter *Turner ltr I*.

the operation get under way "not later than 31 January 1944."¹⁸

Nimitz' headquarters on 20 December issued FLINTLOCK II, a joint staff study which incorporated the results of his recent conversations with Spruance. Carrier aircraft, land-based bombers, and surface ships were to blast the Japanese bases at Wotje and Maloelap. If necessary, the carriers would launch strikes to aid land-based planes in neutralizing Mille, Jaluit, Kusaie, and Eniwetok. The primary objectives remained Roi and Kwajalein Islands, but a secondary target, Majuro Atoll, was also included.

Admiral Spruance, in reviewing the reasons that he recommended Majuro as an objective, stated:

Airfields on Majuro would enable us to help cover shipping moving in for the buildup of Kwajalein, and it would give us a fire protected anchorage at an early date for fleet use, if the capture of Kwajalein were a protracted operation. We had been fortunate during the Gilberts operation in being able to fuel fleet forces at sea without having them attacked by submarines. This we did by shifting the fueling areas daily. There were too many islands through the Marshalls for that area to lend itself to this procedure.¹⁹

With the final selection on 26 December of an assault force for Majuro, the FLINTLOCK plan was completed. For a time, General Smith had considered using most of Tactical Group I, the 22d Marines and the 106th Infantry, against Majuro. A staff officer of Tac-

tical Group I, who was present during the discussions of this phase of the operation, recalled that "General Holland Smith paced the floor of the little planning room, cigar butt in mouth or hand—thinking out loud." Thanks to additional intelligence, the choice by this time lay between employing an entire regiment or a smaller force. After weighing the evidence, Smith announced he was "convinced that there can't be more than a squad or two on those islands today . . . let's use only one battalion for the Majuro job."²⁰ As a result, 2/106 was given the task of seizing Majuro, while the remainder of that regiment and the 22d Marines were designated the reserve for FLINTLOCK.

ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND

Task Force 50, commanded by Admiral Spruance, included all the forces assigned to the FLINTLOCK operation. Its major components were: Task Force 58, Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's fast carriers and modern battleships; Task Force 57, Defense Forces and Land-Based Air, commanded by Rear Admiral John H. Hoover; Task Group 50.15, the Neutralization Group under Rear Admiral Ernest G. Small; and Admiral Turner's Task Force 51, the Joint Expeditionary Force. Admiral Spruance decided to accompany the expedition to the Marshalls, but he would not assume tactical command unless the *Imperial Japanese Navy* chose to contest the operation.

Admiral Turner, as commander of

¹⁸ CominCh memo to CinCPac, ser no. 002415, dtd 4Nov44 (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

¹⁹ Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to ACofs, G-3, HQMC, dtd 10Sep62, hereafter *Spruance 62 ltr*.

²⁰ Col Wallace M. Greene, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 23Nov52, hereafter *Greene ltr I*.

the Joint Expeditionary Force, was primarily concerned with conveying the assault troops to the objective and getting them safely ashore. Within his command were: the Southern Attack Force, over which he retained personal command; the Northern Attack Force, entrusted to Rear Admiral Richard L. Conolly, a veteran of the Sicily landings; the Majuro Attack Group under Rear Admiral Hill, commander at Tarawa; Captain Harold B. Sallada's Headquarters, Supporting Aircraft, the agency through which Admirals Turner, Conolly, and Hill would direct aerial support of the landings; and General Smith's Expeditionary Troops. Among the 297 vessels assigned to Turner for FLINTLOCK were two new AGC command ships, 7 old battle-ships, 11 carriers of various classes, 12 cruisers, 75 destroyers and destroyer escorts, 46 transports, 27 cargo vessels, 5 LSDs, and 45 LSTs.²¹

As far as General Smith's status was concerned, Spruance's command structure for FLINTLOCK fit the situation and continued the primary responsibility of Admiral Turner for the success of the operation.²² Until the amphibious phase was completed and the troops were ashore, Admiral Turner would, through the attack force commanders, exercise tactical control. After the 7th Infantry Division had landed on Kwajalein Island and the 4th Marine Division on Roi-Namur, General Smith was to assume the authority

of corps commander and retain it until Admiral Spruance declared the capture and occupation of the objectives to be completed. The authority of the Marine general, however, was as limited as it had been in the Gilberts operation, for he could not make major changes in the tactical plan nor order unscheduled major landings without the approval of Admiral Turner. Included in Expeditionary Troops with the two assault divisions were the 106th Infantry, 22d Marines, the 1st and 15th Marine Defense Battalions, Marine Headquarters and Service Squadron 31, and several Army and Navy units which would help garrison and develop the captured atolls.

At Roi-Namur, objective of the Northern Attack Force, and at Kwajalein Island, where the Southern Attack Force would strike, Admirals Conolly and Turner were initially to command the assault forces through the appropriate landing force commander. As soon as the landing force commander knew that his troops had made a lodgement, he was to assume command ashore. The Majuro operation was an exception, for Admiral Hill, in command of the attack group, was in control from the time his ships arrived, throughout the fighting ashore, until Admiral Spruance proclaimed the atoll captured.

APPLYING THE LESSONS OF TARAWA

Everyone who took part in planning FLINTLOCK profited from the recent GALVANIC operation. To prevent a repetition of the sort of communications failures that had happened off

²¹ CominCh, *Amphibious Operations: The Marshall Islands, January-February 1944*, dtd 20 May 44, p. 1:5, hereafter CominCh, *Marshall Islands*.

²² Moore comments *Marshall*.

Betio, the commander of each attack force was to sail in a ship especially designed to serve as a floating headquarters during an amphibious assault. The AGC *Rocky Mount* would carry Turner to Kwajalein, while Conolly would command the Roi-Namur assault from the AGC *Appalachian*. The *Cambria*, a transport equipped with additional communications equipment, was assigned to Admiral Hill for use at Majuro.

Prior to the attack on Tarawa, Marine planners had requested permission to land first on the islands near Betio to gain artillery positions from which to support the main assault. The loss of surprise and the consequent risk to valuable shipping were judged to outweigh the tactical benefits to be gained from these preparatory landings, and the 2d Marine Division was directed to strike directly at the principal objective. Such was not the case in FLINTLOCK. Plans called for both the 7th Infantry Division and the 4th Marine Division to occupy four lesser islands before launching their main attacks.

In addition to providing for artillery support of the major landings, planners sought to increase the effectiveness of naval gunfire. On D minus 1, while cruisers and destroyers of Task Force 51 bombarded Maloelap and Wotje, Admiral Mitscher's fast battleships were to hammer Roi-Namur and Kwajalein Islands. At dawn, elements of Task Force 58 would begin the task of destroying Japanese aircraft, making the flight strips temporarily useless, and shattering coastal defense guns. After pausing for an air strike, the ships were to resume firing, primarily

against shore defenses. On D-Day, the landing forces would seize certain small islands adjacent to the main objectives. These operations were to be supported by naval gunfire and aerial bombardment in a manner similar to that planned for the assaults on Kwajalein Island and Roi-Namur. Plans also called for the American warships to maintain the neutralization of principal objectives while supporting the secondary landings elsewhere in the atoll.

About 25 minutes before H-Hour for the main landings, cruisers, destroyers, and LCI(G)s were to begin firing into the assault beaches, distributing high explosives throughout an area bounded by lines 100 yards seaward of the edge of the water, 200 yards inshore, and 300 yards beyond both flanks. Admiral Turner directed that cruisers continue their bombardment until the landing craft were 1,000 yards from shore, destroyers until the assault waves were 500 yards or less from the island, and LCI(G)s until the troops were even closer to their assigned beaches. Since the plan depended upon the progress of the assault rather than on a fixed schedule, the defenders would not be given the sort of respite gained by the Betio garrison.²³

²³ The executive officer of the 106th Infantry recalled that, during a briefing of principal commanders and staff officers at Pearl Harbor in January, Admiral Turner said, in effect: "I say to you commanders of ships—your mission is to put the troops ashore and support their attack to the limit of your capabilities. We expect to lose some ships! If your mission demands it, risk *your* ship!" Col Joseph J. Farley, AUS, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 200ct62.

The LCI(G)s which figured so prominently in Admiral Turner's plans were infantry landing craft converted into shallow-draft gunboats. These vessels mounted .50 caliber machine guns, 40mm and 20mm guns, as well as 4.5-inch rockets. Another means of neutralizing the beach defenses was provided by the armored amphibian, LVT(A) (1), which boasted a 37mm gun and five .30 caliber machine guns. One machine gun was located atop the turret, one was mounted coaxially with the cannon, a third was located in a ball and socket mount in the forepart of the hull, and the other two were placed on ring mounts to the rear of the turret.²⁴ Protection for the crew of six was provided by $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of armor plate and by small shields fixed to the exposed machine guns. Neither the LCI(G)s nor the LVT(A) (1)s were troop carriers.²⁵ A few LVT(2)s with troops embarked were equipped with multiple rocket launchers to assist in the last-minute pounding of Japanese shore defenses.

Admiral Turner and General Smith also attempted to increase the effectiveness of supporting aircraft. The strikes delivered to cover the approaching assault waves were scheduled according to the progress of the LVTs. When the amphibian tractors reached a specified distance from the beaches, the planes would begin their attacks, diving parallel to the course of the landing craft and at a steep angle to

lessen the danger of accidentally hitting friendly troops. During these pre-assault aerial attacks, both naval guns and artillery were ordered to suspend firing.

Throughout the operation, carrier planes assigned to support ground troops were subject to control by both the Commander, Support Aircraft, and the airborne coordinator. The coordinator, whose plane remained on station during daylight hours, could initiate strikes against targets of opportunity, but the other officer, who received his information from the attack force commanders, was better able to arrange for attacks that involved close cooperation with artillery or naval gunfire. During GALVANIC, the airborne coordinator had performed the additional task of relaying information on the progress of the battle. This extra burden now fell to a ground officer, trained as an aerial observer, who would report from dawn to dusk on the location of friendly units, enemy strongpoints, and hostile activities.²⁶

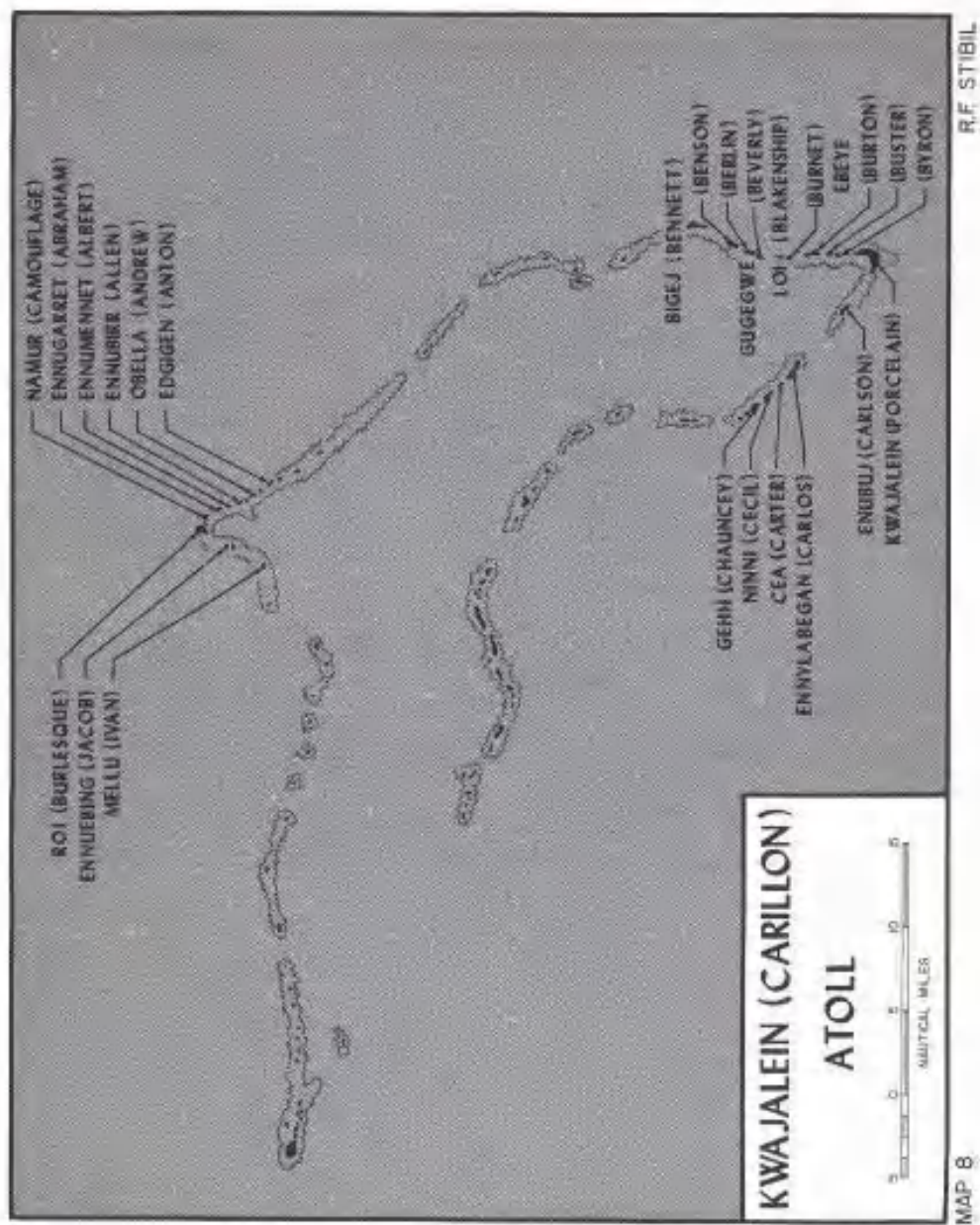
THE LANDING FORCE PLANS

The objectives finally selected for FLINTLOCK were Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls. Measuring about 24 miles from east to west and 5 miles from north to south, Majuro was located 220 nautical miles southeast of Kwajalein. Admiral Hill, in command of the Majuro force, decided to await the results of a final reconnaissance before choosing his course of action. Elements of the VAC Reconnaissance Company

²⁴ Col Louis A. Metzger ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 24Oct62, hereafter *Metzger ltr*.

²⁵ ONI, ND, *Allied Landing Craft and Ships, Supplement No. 1 to ONI 226* (Washington, 1945), PhibVehsSec.

²⁶ CominCh, *Marshall Islands*, p. 2:7.



would land on Eroj and Calalin, the islands that guarded the entrance to Majuro lagoon, then scout the remaining islands. Once Japanese strength and dispositions had been determined, the landing force, 2/106, could make its assault.

Kwajalein Atoll, 540 miles northwest of Tarawa, is a triangular grouping of 93 small reef-encircled islands. The enclosed lagoon covers 655 square miles. Because of the vast size of the atoll, Admiral Turner had divided the Expeditionary Force into Northern and Southern Landing Forces. In the north, at the apex of the triangle, the recently activated 4th Marine Division, commanded by Major General Harry Schmidt, a veteran of the Nicaraguan campaign, was to seize Roi-Namur, twin islands joined by a causeway and a narrow strip of beach. The site of a Japanese airfield, Roi had been stripped of vegetation, but Namur, where the enemy had constructed numerous concrete buildings, was covered with palms, breadfruit trees, and brush. The code names chosen for the islands were CAMOUFLAGE for wooded Namur and for Roi, because so little of it was concealed, BURLLESQUE.²⁷ (See Map 8.)

Crescent-shaped Kwajalein Island, objective of the Southern Landing Force, lay at the southeastern corner of the atoll, some 44 nautical miles from Roi-Namur. Major General Charles H. Corlett, who had led the Kiska landing force, would hurl his 7th Infantry Division against the largest island in the atoll. Here the enemy had constructed

an airfield and over 100 large buildings. Although portions of the seaward coastline were heavily wooded, an extensive road net covered most of the island.

Throughout the planning of the Marshalls operation, General Schmidt and his staff were located at Camp Pendleton, California, some 2,200 miles from General Smith's headquarters at Pearl Harbor. The problem posed by this distance was solved by shuttling staff officers back and forth across the Pacific, but division planners continued to work under two disadvantages, a shortage of time and a lack of information. These twin difficulties stemmed from Admiral Nimitz' sudden decision to attack Kwajalein Atoll, bypassing Wotje and Maloelap. The division staff, however, proved adequate to the challenge, and by the end of December its basic plan had been approved by VAC. The timing of approval and issue was so tight, however, that some units sailed for Hawaii without seeing a copy.²⁸

The Northern Landing Force plan consisted of three phases: the capture of four offshore islands, the seizure of Roi-Namur, and the securing of 11 small islands along the northeastern rim of Kwajalein Atoll. The first phase was entrusted to the IVAN Landing Group, the 25th Marines, Reinforced, commanded by Brigadier General James L. Underhill, the Assistant Division Commander. These troops were to seize ALBERT (Ennumennet), ALLEN (Ennubirr), JACOB (Ennuebing), and IVAN (Mellu) Islands as firing positions for

²⁷ BGen Homer L. Litzenberg ltr to CMC, dtd 31Jan53.

²⁸ Metzger ltr.

the 14th Marines, the division artillery regiment. The troops involved in this operation would land from LVTs provided by the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Company A, 11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, which reinforced the 10th, along with Companies B and D, 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion, were chosen to spearhead the assaults. When this phase was completed, the LVT and artillery units would revert to division control, and the 25th Marines would become the division reserve for the next phase.

The 23d Marines received the assignment of storming Roi while the 24th Marines simultaneously attacked Namur. Both regiments were to land from the lagoon, the 23d Marines over Red Beaches 2 and 3 and the 24th Marines on Green 1 and 2. In the meantime, the 25th Marines could be called upon to capture ABRAHAM (Ennugarret) Island.²⁹ Detailed plans for the final phase were not issued at this time.

General Schmidt organized his assault waves to obtain the most devastating effect from his armored amphibians and LCI gunboats. The LCI(G)s were to lead the way until they were about 1,000 yards from the beach. Here they were to halt, fire their rockets, and continue to support the assault with their automatic weapons. Then the LVT(A)s would pass through the line of gunboats, open fire with 37mm cannon and machine guns, and continue their barrage "from

most advantageous positions."³⁰ The troop carriers were directed to follow the armored vehicles, passing through the line of supporting amphibians if it was stopped short of the beach. The few LVT(2)s armed with rockets were to discharge these missiles as they drew abreast of the LCIs.

The 7th Infantry Division faced fewer difficulties in planning for the capture of Kwajalein Island. General Corlett was experienced in large-scale amphibious operations, and two of his regiments, the 17th and 32d Infantry, had fought at Attu, while the third, the 184th Infantry, had landed without opposition at Kiska. The Army division easily kept pace with the changes in the FLINTLOCK concept, for its headquarters was not far from General Smith's corps headquarters.

Like the Marine division in the north, General Corlett's Southern Landing Force faced an operation divided into several phases. The first of these was the capture of CARLSON (Enubuj), CARLOS (Ennylabegan), CECIL (Ninni), and CARTER (Gea) Islands by the 17th Infantry and its attached units. Once these objectives were secured and artillery emplaced on CARLSON, the 17th Infantry would revert to landing force reserve. Next, the 184th and 32d Infantry would land at the western end of Kwajalein Island and attack down the long axis of the island. The third phase, the seizing of BURTON (Ebeye), BURNET (unnamed), BLAKENSHIP (Loi), BUSTER (unnamed), and BYRON (unnamed), as well as the final oper-

²⁹ The attack on ABRAHAM eventually was scheduled to precede the Roi-Namur landings.

³⁰ 4th MarDiv LdgSked, dtd 10Jan44, Anx M to 4th MarDiv OPlan 3-44.

ations, the landings on BEVERLY (South Gugegwe), BERLIN (North Gugegwe), BENSON (unnamed), and BENNETT (Bigej), were tentatively arranged, but the assault troops were not yet designated.³¹ (See Map 8.)

The assault formations devised by Corlett's staff differed very little from those in the 4th Marine Division plan. Instead of preceding the first assault wave, the armored LVTs, amphibian tanks in Army terminology, were to take station on its flanks. Also, the Army plan called for the LVT(A)s to land regardless of Japanese opposition and support the advance from positions ashore. After the infantry had moved 100 yards inland, the amphibians might withdraw.³²

INTELLIGENCE³³

When Admiral Nimitz first began planning his Marshalls offensive, he had little information on the defenses of those islands. Because the enemy had held the area for almost a quarter-century, the Americans assumed that the atolls would be even more formidable than Tarawa. The first photographs of the probable objectives in the western Marshalls were not available to General Smith's staff until after GAL-

³¹ 7th InfDiv FO No. 1, dtd 6Jan44, FO Phase II, dtd 6Jan44, FO Phase III, dtd 12Jan44, FO Phase IV, dtd 12Jan44, FO Phase V, dtd 12Jan44, and FO No. 5, dtd 4Feb44.

³² LVT Anx, dtd 8Jan44, Anx 8 to 7th InfDiv FO No. 1, dtd 6Jan44, hereafter *7th InfDiv FO 1*.

³³ Additional sources for this section include: 4th MarDiv Est of Sit for Kwajalein Island, n.d.; IntelPlan, n.d., Anx 3 to *7th InfDiv FO 1*.

VANIC was completed. The corps, however, managed to complete its preliminary area study on 26 November. Copies of this document were then sent to both assault divisions. Throughout these weeks of planning, the 7th Infantry Division G-2 was a frequent visitor to General Smith's headquarters, and this close liaison aided General Corlett in drafting his landing force plan. Unfortunately, close personal contact with the 4th Marine Division staff was impossible, but corps headquarters did exchange representatives with General Schmidt's command.

Carrier planes photographed Kwajalein Atoll during a raid on 4 December, but the pictures they made gave only limited coverage of this objective. Interviews with the pilots provided many missing details. Additional aerial photos of the atoll were taken during December and January. Reconnaissance planes took pictures of Majuro on 10 December. A final photographic mission was scheduled for Kwajalein atoll just two days before D-Day.

Submarines also contributed valuable intelligence on reefs, beaches, tides, and currents of Kwajalein. The *Seal* photographed the atoll in December, and the *Tarpon* carried out a similar mission the following month. Plans called for Underwater Demolition Teams, making their first appearance in combat, to finish the work begun by the undersea craft. These units were to scout the beaches of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur Islands on the night of 31 January-1 February. After obtaining up-to-date hydrographic data, the swimmers would return to destroy mines and antiboat obstacles.

By mid-January, VAC intelligence officers had concluded that Kwajalein Atoll, headquarters of the *6th Base Force* and, temporarily, of the *Fourth Fleet*, was the cornerstone of the Marshalls fortress. Originally, most of the weapons emplaced on the larger islands of the atoll had been sited to protect the ocean beaches, but since the Tarawa operation, in which the Marines had attacked from the lagoon, the garrisons were strengthening and rearranging their defenses. Except for Kwajalein Island, where photographs indicated a cross-island line, the Japanese had concentrated their heaviest installations along the beaches. In general, the assault forces could expect a bitter fight at the beaches as the enemy attempted to thwart the landing. Once this outer perimeter was breached, the defenders would fight to the death from shell holes, ruined buildings, and other improvised positions.

The atoll garrison was believed to be composed of the *6th Base Force*, *61st Naval Guard Force*, a portion of the *122d Infantry Regiment*, and a detachment of the *4th Civil Engineers*. Intelligence specialists believed that reinforcements, elements of the *52d Division*, were being transferred from the Carolines to various sites in the Marshalls. The enemy's total strength throughout Kwajalein Atoll was estimated to be 8,000–9,600 men, 6,150–7,100 of them combat troops.

General Smith's intelligence section predicted that the 7th Infantry Division would face 2,300–2,600 combat troops and 1,200–1,600 laborers. The enemy appeared to have built a defensive line across Kwajalein Island just east of the airfield, works designed to

supplement the pillboxes, trenches, and gun emplacements that fringed the island. Photographs of Roi-Namur disclosed coastal perimeters that featured strongpoints at each corner of both islands. Very few weapons positions were discovered in the interior of either island. Namur, however, because of its many buildings and heavy undergrowth, offered the enemy an excellent chance to improvise a defense in depth. At both Kwajalein and Roi-Namur Islands, the installations along the ocean coasts were stronger than those facing the lagoon. No integrated defenses and only a small outpost detachment were observed on Majuro. (See Map V, Map Section.)

Corps also had the task of preparing and distributing the charts and maps used by the assault troops, naval gunfire teams, defense battalions, and other elements of FLINTLOCK Expeditionary Troops. Each division received 1,000 copies of charts (on a scale of one inch to one nautical mile) and of special terrain maps (1:20,000), and as many as 2,000 copies of another type of special terrain map (1:3,000). On the 1:3,000 maps, the particular island was divided into north, east, west, and south zones. Within each zone, known gun positions were numbered in clockwise order, each number prefixed by N, E, W, or S to indicate the proper zone. All crossroads and road junctions also were given numbers. Besides the customary grid system, these maps also showed the number and outline of all naval gunfire sectors. By compressing so much information onto a single sheet, the corps devised a map that suited a variety of units.

The information gathered, evaluated, and distributed by Admiral Nimitz' Joint Intelligence Center, General Smith's amphibious corps, and Admiral Turner's amphibious force was both accurate and timely. Sound intelligence enabled Nimitz to alter his plans and strike directly at Kwajalein. A knowledge of the enemy defenses made possible an accurate destructive bombardment and, together with hydrographic information, guided attack force and landing force commanders in the selection of assault beaches.

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTROL ³⁴

Generals Corlett and Schmidt planned to destroy the enemy garrison in a series of carefully coordinated amphibious landings. For this reason, success depended to a great extent upon reliable communications and accurate timing. Although the introduction of command vessels had given attack force and landing force commanders a better means of controlling the different phases of the operation, not every communications problem had been solved.

The Marine assault troops assigned to FLINTLOCK used much of the same communications equipment that had proved inadequate in the Gilberts. The radios in the LVTs were not waterproofed, a fact which would greatly reduce communication effectiveness during the landing.³⁵ Both the TBX and TBY radios, neither type ade-

quately waterproof, had to be used again in the Marshalls. Eventually, it was hoped, these sets could be replaced, the TBX by some new, lighter, and more reliable piece of equipment and the TBY by the portable SCR 300 and mobile SCR 610 used by the Army. Although intended for infantrymen rather than communications men, the hand-carried MU radios were too fragile to survive the rugged treatment given them in rifle units. The SCR 610 worked well, but it too was vulnerable to water damage. No waterproof bags were available for either spare radio batteries or telephone equipment.

In an attempt to insure unbroken communications, both the 4th Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division were assigned Joint Assault Signal Companies (JASCOS). The Marine 1st JASCO was activated on 20 October 1943 at Camp Pendleton, California. The primary mission of this unit was to coordinate all supporting fires available to a Marine division during an amphibious operation. In order to carry out this function, the company was divided into Shore and Beach Party Communications Teams, Air Liaison Parties, and Shore Fire Control Parties. Early in December, the company joined VAC and was promptly attached to the 4th Marine Division. During training, the various teams were attached to the regiments and battalions of the division. Thus each assault battalion could become familiar with its shore and beach party, air liaison, and fire control teams. The Army 75th JASCO was attached in the same manner to the battalions of the 7th Infantry Division.

Communications equipment, how-

³⁴ An additional source for this section is CominCh, *Marshall Islands*, pp. 6:1-6:4, 8:1-8:13.

³⁵ Metzger ltr.

ever, was but a means of control. If the landings were to succeed, they would have to be precisely organized and accurately timed. Unit commanders and control officers would have to be located where they could see what was happening and influence the conduct of the battle. For FLINTLOCK, the movement of assault troops from the transports to the beaches was carefully planned, and an adequate system of control was devised.

Instead of transferring from transports to landing craft and finally to LVTs, as had been done at Tarawa, the first waves of assault troops were to move from the transports directly to the LSTs that carried their assigned tractors.³⁶ The men would climb into the assault craft as the LSTs steamed to a position near the line of departure from which the ships would launch the amphibians. Next, the LVTs were to form waves, each one guided by a boat commander. At the line of departure, the commander of each wave reported to the control officer, a member of the V Amphibious Force staff.

Among other vessels, each control officer had at his disposal two LCCs (Landing Craft Control vessels), steel-hulled craft similar in appearance to motor torpedo boats. These carried radar and other navigational aids and were designated as flank guides for the leading assault waves. After the first four waves had crossed the reef, the LCCs, which were incapable of beaching and retracting, would take up sta-

tion in a designated area 2,000 yards from shore. Since reserve units were to follow a transfer scheme similar to that planned for Tarawa, officers in the LCCs now had to supervise the shifting of men from landing craft to returning LVTs, as well as the formation of waves, and the dispatch of tractors to the beach.

A submarine chaser was assigned the control officer to enable him to move wherever he might be needed in the immediate vicinity of the line of departure. A representative of the landing force commander, the commander of the amphibian tractor battalion, a representative of the division supply officer, and a medical officer were embarked in the same craft. These men were given power to make decisions concerning the ship-to-shore movement, the landing of supplies, and the evacuation of wounded.

A second submarine chaser, this one stationed continuously at the line of departure, carried a representative of the transport group commander. This officer saw to it that the waves crossed the line either according to the pre-arranged schedule, as the control officer directed, or in the case of later waves as the regimental commander requested.

Off the beach his troops were assaulting, the regimental commander was to establish a temporary floating command post in a submarine chaser. While in this vessel, he would be able to contact by radio or visual signals the landing force commander, the various boat waves, and his battalions already ashore. As soon as the regimental commanders had established command posts ashore, the submarine chasers

³⁶ This method was to be used on D plus 1. The troops bound for the outlying island were scheduled to transfer at sea from LCVPs to LVTs.

could be used by the division headquarters.

LOGISTICS ³⁷

The geographical separation of the units assigned to FLINTLOCK affected logistical planning as well as tactical training. The 4th Marine Division trained at Camp Pendleton and prepared to sail from San Diego, the 7th Infantry Division and 106th Infantry trained on Oahu, and the 22d Marines made ready in Samoa prior to its movement to the Hawaiian Islands. In spite of the distance involved, General Smith later reported that in the field of logistics "no major difficulties were encountered." ³⁸

There were, however, several minor problems. The 22d Marines, for example, was unable to obtain from Marine sources either 2.36-inch rocket launchers and ammunition for them, or shaped demolitions charges, but a last-minute request to Army agencies was successful.³⁹ The 4th Marine Division had to revise its logistical plans in the midst of combat loading. Originally, Admiral Nimitz had prescribed that each division carry to the objective five units of fire for each of its weapons except antiaircraft guns. Officers of the 7th Infantry Division re-

quested additional ammunition, but the admiral was reluctant to accept their recommendations. Not until 5 January did he approve 10 units of fire for 105mm howitzers and 8 for all other ground weapons. Nor was the 7th Infantry Division without its troubles, for the water containers provided by Army sources proved useless, and drums had to be obtained from the Navy.

A total of 42 days' rations was scheduled to be carried to Kwajalein Atoll. Each Marine or soldier was to land with 2 days' emergency rations. A 4-day supply of the same type of food was loaded in LSTs, and an additional 6-day amount was lashed to pallets for storage in the transports. The cargo ships assigned to the expedition carried enough dried, canned, and processed food to last the assault and garrison troops for 30 days. Five day's water, in 5-gallon cans and 55-gallon drums, was stowed in the LSTs and transports. Logistical plans also called for a 30-day quantity of maintenance, medical, and aviation supplies, as well as fuels and lubricants. The assault divisions and the garrison units also brought with them large amounts of barbed wire, sandbags, and light construction material.

Not all of this mountain of supplies and ammunition was combat loaded. Those items likely to be needed early in the operation were stowed in easily accessible places according to probable order of use. The remaining supplies were loaded deep within the cargo vessels in a manner calculated to conserve space. Some emergency supplies, including ammunition, water, and rations, were placed in LSTs.

Admiral Conolly divided his trans-

³⁷ Additional sources for this section include: VAC Rpt of LogAspects of FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 23Mar44 hereafter *VAC Rpt of LogAspects*; LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "General and Miscellaneous Notes on Central Pacific: Supply." (Hist MS File, OCMH); CominCh, *Marshall Islands*, pp. 5:1-5:25, 6:13-6:16.

³⁸ *VAC Rpt of LogAspects*.

³⁹ *Greene ltr I*.

ports into three groups, one per infantry regiment, each with four transports and a cargo vessel. The 105mm howitzers of the 4th Marine Division were loaded into LCMs, landing craft that would be ferried to Roi-Namur in an LSD. The 75mm pack howitzers were placed in LVTs, and these tractors embarked in LSTs. A second LSD carried the LCMs in which the 15 Shermans of the division medium tank company were loaded. All 36 light tanks of the 4th Tank Battalion were stowed in the transports. Admiral Turner, who had retained responsibility for conducting the 7th Infantry Division to Kwajalein Island, organized his shipping in much the same way.

At Tarawa, the flow of supplies to the assault units had been slow and uncertain. Admiral Turner, in an effort to prevent a similar disruption, directed that beach party and shore party units sail in the same transports, draw up joint plans, and land rapidly. Skeleton beach parties and elements of shore parties were assigned to the fourth wave at each beach, and the remainder of the units were ordered to follow as quickly as possible.

The corps directed the 7th Infantry Division to form shore parties from its 50th Engineer Battalion and elements of the Kwajalein Island garrison force, while the 4th Marine Division was to rely upon men from the 20th Marines, its engineer regiment. One shore party, reinforced by medical, quartermaster, ordnance, and other special troops, was attached to each infantry battalion. The principal weakness in this phase of the supply plan was the use of men from reserve combat units

to bring the shore parties to their authorized strength of approximately 400. Pontoon causeways, broken into sections and loaded in LSTs, were made available for use at Roi-Namur, Kwajalein, and CARLSON Islands, and at Majuro Atoll. The pontoons could be joined together to serve as piers for the unloading of heavy equipment.

Enough emergency supplies were loaded in LSTs to sustain the battle until the beaches were secured. At Roi-Namur, LVTs, the only amphibious cargo vehicles available to the Marine division, were to serve as the link between the LSTs and the battalions advancing inland. After the beaches had been secured, the transports would begin unloading.

The 7th Infantry Division had, in addition to its amphibian tractors, 100 DUKWs. These 2½-ton amphibian trucks were called upon to perform at Kwajalein Island much of the work expected of LVTs at Roi-Namur. Sixty DUKWs were assigned to land the division artillery, and 40 of them, also stowed in LSTs, were to give logistical support to infantry units by bringing ashore emergency supplies. Some of the critical items were loaded in the trucks before the parent LSTs sailed from Hawaii.

Admiral Turner's medical plan gave beachmasters authority over the evacuation of wounded. Theirs was the task of selecting the boats or amphibious vehicles that would carry away casualties. The medical section of the beach party was responsible for distributing the wounded among the cargo ships and transports. All of these vessels could receive the injured, but by D plus 3 all casualties

would be collected in specified vessels or transferred to the hospital ships scheduled to arrive on that day.

TRAINING FOR FLINTLOCK

The 4th Marine Division was able to undergo amphibious training in conjunction with Admiral Conolly's support ships and transports. A division exercise was held on 14-15 December, before either the admiral or General Schmidt were certain what course FLINTLOCK would follow. Another exercise took place at San Clemente Island off the California coast on 2-3 January 1944. This second landing was in effect a rehearsal, for all amphibious shipping joined many of Conolly's warships and carriers in the exercise.

The January landing also gave the division a chance to test its aerial observers. These were the ground officers who would be flown over Roi-Namur to report throughout the day on the progress of the battle. This aspect of the exercise was a complete success, but the work of the LVTs and LSTs was far less impressive.

On 5 December, the division's 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion was broken up, and four-seventh's of its men were used to form the cadre of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, reinforced by Company A, 11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion.⁴⁰ The two units were then brought up to authorized strength by the addition of re-

cruits and the transfer of trained crews from the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion. By the time these changes had been made, less than a month remained in which to check the tractors, install armor plate, waterproof radios, train the new crews, lay plans for the landings, take part in the San Clemente rehearsal, load the vehicles into amphibious shipping, and make a final check to determine that the LVTs were fit for combat. These varied tasks had to be carried out simultaneously with the obtaining of supplies, processing of men, and the other duties routine to a unit preparing for action.

Unfortunately, many of the LSTs were manned by sailors as inexperienced as the Marine tractor crews. Admiral Conolly recalled:

A number of these ships were rushed from their Ohio River building yards straight to the West Coast. They had inadequate basic training, little or no time to work with their embarked troops, and, in some cases, arrived in San Diego a matter of a few days before final departure for the Marshalls.⁴¹

Although the San Clemente exercise was staged to promote close cooperation between the LSTs and LVTs, the sailors and Marines gained little confidence in one another. Some of the ships refused to recover any tractors except those they had launched; as a result several tractors ran out of gas and were lost. There also was one collision between an LST and an LVT. "All this," one participant drily ob-

⁴⁰ LtCol Victor J. Croizat ltr to Drs. Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, dtd 30Apr51, encl to Col Victor J. Croizat ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 13Sep62.

⁴¹ VAdm Richard L. Conolly ltr to Dr. Jeter A. Isely, dtd 31Aug49, encl to Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 22Oct62.

served, "was very poor for morale just before combat."⁴²

The LSTs, loaded with amphibian tractors, sailed from San Diego on 6 January, to be followed a week later by the remainder of Admiral Conolly's attack force. At the time of its departure, the first convoy had not yet received copies of the final operations plans issued by Admirals Spruance, Turner, and Conolly. These documents did not arrive until 18 January, two days before the LSTs set sail for the Marshalls and two days prior to the arrival of the rest of Conolly's ships in Hawaiian waters. Since the two groups shaped different courses toward the objective, there was no opportunity for last-minute coordination.⁴³

General Corlett, like General Schmidt, had carefully studied the lessons of Tarawa, so the 7th Infantry Division also was thoroughly trained for atoll warfare. The Army unit, however, had its share of problems in finding crews for its amphibian tractors. On 25 November, the division established a school to train members of the regimental antitank companies as LVT drivers and mechanics. The graduates of this course were selected to man the tractors that would carry the assault waves. The landings would be supported by the 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion which was attached to the division early in December. For FLINTLOCK the amphibian tractors were incorporated into the Army tank

battalion and the resultant organization called the 708th Provisional Amphibian Tractor Battalion.⁴⁴

By the time of its attachment to VAC for operational control, the 7th Infantry Division was well grounded in tank-infantry-engineer teamwork. The amphibious training of General Corlett's troops took place in December and January, with the most attention devoted to the comparatively inexperienced 184th Infantry. The division and the 22d Marines conducted their final rehearsals between 12 and 17 January. The troops landed at Maui's Maalaea Bay and made a simulated assault on Kahoolawe Island. The Majuro landing force, 2/106, made a practice landing on the shores of Oahu on 14 January.

PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS⁴⁵

Aircraft of all services joined surface ships in a series of raids planned to batter Kwajalein Atoll, neutralize the Japanese bases that surrounded it, and gain information on the enemy's defenses. Mille, Jaluit, and Maloelap were the principal targets hit during November and December by Army and Navy planes of Admiral Hoover's command. During January, after the Gilberts fields had been completed, the heaviest tonnage fell on Kwajalein and Wotje. Land-based planes in De-

⁴⁴ Marshall notes, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

⁴² LtCol Louis Metzger ltr to CMC, dtd 13Nov52.

⁴³ *Ibid.*; Col William R. Wendt ltr to CMC, dtd 19Feb53; LtCol Victor J. Croizat ltr to CMC, dtd 10Nov52, hereafter *Croizat ltr.*

⁴⁵ Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac-CinCPOA WarDs, Nov43-Feb44 (CinCPac File, HistBr, HQMC); ComCenPac Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, n.d.; CominCh, *Marshall Islands*, pp. 1:1-1:4; Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*.

cember and January dropped 326 tons of explosives on targets in Maloelap Atoll, 313 on Kwajalein, 256 on Jaluit, 415 on Mille, and 367 on Wotje. The Japanese retaliated by loosing a total of 193 tons of bombs on Makin, Tarawa, and Apamama. In the meantime, patrol bombers from Midway were active over Wake Island.

On 4 December, while Army bombers were raiding Nauru Island and Mille, carrier task groups commanded by Rear Admirals Charles A. Pownall and Alfred E. Montgomery launched 246 planes against Kwajalein and Wotje Atolls. The aviators sank 4 cargo ships, damaged 2 old light cruisers, shot down 19 enemy fighters, and destroyed many other planes on the ground. Japanese fliers, stung by this blow, caught the retiring carriers, and in a night torpedo attack damaged the USS *Lexington*.

Except for an attack by carrier aircraft and surface ships against Nauru on 8 December, land-based planes swung the cudgel until 29 January. On that day, carriers and fast battleships returned to the Marshalls, attacking the Japanese bases in an unexpected thrust from the westward.⁴⁶ Rear Admiral Samuel P. Ginder's carriers hit Maloelap, and Rear Admiral John W. Reeves sent his aircraft against Wotje, while carrier task

groups commanded by Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman and Admiral Montgomery attacked Kwajalein and Roi-Namur Islands. Surface ships bombarded the targets in conjunction with the air raids.

On 30 January, Reeves took over the preparatory attack against Kwajalein Island, while Sherman began a 3-day effort against Eniwetok Atoll.⁴⁷ Ginder maintained the neutralization of Wotje, refueled, and on 3 February replaced Sherman. The task groups under Reeves and Montgomery continued to support operations at Kwajalein Atoll until 3 February.

As these preparations mounted in intensity, the Northern and Southern Attack Forces drew near to their objectives. On 30 January, fire support ships of these forces paused to hammer Wotje and Maloelap before continuing onward to Roi-Namur and Kwajalein. Meanwhile, the supporting escort carriers (CVEs) joined in the preparatory aerial bombardment of the objectives. On 31 January, the 4th Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division would begin operations against island fortresses believed to be stronger than Betio.

⁴⁶ A feature of Admiral Spruance's plan was that the fast battleships and carriers would form up at Funafuti in the Ellice Islands well to the southeast of the Marshalls. Battleships arriving from the Atlantic anchored there in time to join the carriers and launch the pre-invasion attack. Japanese searches were conducted to the eastward. *Moore comments Marshalls*.

⁴⁷ The original CinPac plan for air support had called for the fast carriers to make a 2-day strike and then withdraw for several days before returning to cover the landings. Admiral Spruance objected to this plan and substituted his own, which insured that Japanese air was "taken out on all positions except Eniwetok on the first day," and that the airfields on Wotje, Taroa [Maloelap], and Kwajalein were "kept immobilized thereafter by naval gunfire on the runways." He sent Sherman's group to hit Eniwetok and "keep the air pipeline . . . inoperative while we captured Kwajalein." *Spruance 62 ltr.*



ROI-NAMUR, under bombing attack by Seventh Air Force planes, appears in an intelligence photo taken just prior to the pre-landing bombardment (USAF B50003AC)

*THE DEFENSES OF
KWAJALEIN ATOLL*⁴⁸

Just as he had startled his subordinates by proposing an immediate attack on Kwajalein, Nimitz also surprised his adversaries. "There was divided opinion as to whether you would land at Jaluit or Mille," a Japanese naval officer confessed after the war. "Some thought you would land on Wotje, but there were few who thought you would go right to the heart of the Marshalls and take Kwajalein."⁴⁹

Unlike their leaders, the defenders of Kwajalein Atoll, dazed by a succession of air raids, quickly became convinced that their atoll ranked high on Nimitz' list of objectives. "I welcome the New Year at my ready station beside the gun," commented a squad leader in the *61st Guard Force*. "This will be a year of decisive battles. I suppose the enemy, after taking Tarawa and Makin, will continue on to the Marshalls, but the Kwajalein defenses are very strong."⁵⁰

Actually the Japanese high command had been slow to grasp the importance of the Marshalls. Prewar plans called principally for extensive mine-laying to deny the atolls to United States forces,

but the effectiveness of medium bombers during the war against the Chinese had indicated that similar planes based on atolls could be a grave threat to shipping. A survey showed that the best sites for air bases were Wotje, Maloelap, Majuro, Mille, and Kwajalein. This last atoll, now the target of the American expeditionary force, was selected as administrative and communications center for the Marshalls area.

During 1941, the *6th Base Force* and the *24th Air Squadron* of the *Fourth Fleet*⁵¹ were made responsible for defending the islands. The base force immediately set to work building gun emplacements and other structures at Kwajalein, Wotje, Maloelap, and Jaluit. By December 1941, the various projects were nearly complete, and the Japanese forces employed against the Gilberts and Wake Island were able to operate from the Marshalls.⁵²

The number of troops assigned to the Marshalls grew throughout 1942, but the islands themselves began to diminish in strategic importance. Japanese planners came to regard the Marshalls, like the Gilberts, as outposts to protect the more important Carolines and Marianas. Although the *Imperial Navy* began, in the fall of 1943, to speed work on the defenses of the Carolines and Marianas, the Marshalls were not neglected. If attacked, the outlying atolls were to hold out long enough for naval forces and aircraft to arrive on

⁴⁸ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA Bul 48-44, Japanese Defs, Kwajalein Island, dtd 10Apr44; 4th MarDiv IntelRpt on FLINTLOCK Op, n.d.; USSBS, *Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington, 1946), hereafter USSBS, *Campaigns of the Pacific War*.

⁴⁹ USSBS (Pac), NavAnalysis Div, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, 2 vols (Washington, 1946), Interrogation Nav No. 34, Cdr Chikataka Nakajima, IJN, dtd 21Oct45, I, p. 144, hereafter *USSBS Interrogation* with relevant number and name.

⁵⁰ JICPOA Item No. 5913, Diary of Mimori.

⁵¹ Chief, WarHistOff, DefAgency of Japan, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 14Jan63.

⁵² MilHistSec, Japanese RschDiv, HqAFFE, Japanese Monograph No. 173, *Inner South Seas Islands Area Naval Operations, Part II: Marshall Islands Operations (Dec44-Feb44)*.

the scene and destroy the American warships and transports. These were the same tactics that had failed in the Gilberts.⁵³

Late in 1943, large numbers of Army troops began arriving in the Marshalls, and by the end of that year 13,721 men of the *1st South Seas Detachment*, *1st Amphibious Brigade*, *2d South Seas Detachment*, and *3d South Seas Detachment* were stationed on atolls in the group, on nearby Wake Island, and at Kusaie. Of these units, only the *1st South Seas Detachment* had seen combat. Its men had been incorporated into the *122d Infantry Regiment* and had fought for three months on Bataan Peninsula during the Japanese conquest of the Philippines.

The enemy also sent the *24th Air Flotilla* to the threatened area. This fresh unit served briefly under the *22d Air Flotilla* already in the area, but at the time of the first preparatory carrier strikes, the remaining veteran pilots of the *22d* were withdrawn and their mission of defending the Marshalls handed over to the newcomers.⁵⁴ As the Kwajalein operation drew nearer, progressively fewer Japanese planes were able to oppose the aerial attacks. By 31 January, American pilots had won mastery of the Marshalls skies.

At Roi-Namur, principal objective of the 4th Marine Division, was the headquarters of the *24th Air Flotilla*, commanded by Vice Admiral Michiyuki

Yamada, who had charge of all aerial forces in the Marshalls. The enemy garrison was composed mainly of pilots, mechanics, and aviation support troops, 1,500-2,000 in all. Also, there were between 300 and 600 members of the *61st Guard Force*, and possibly more than 1,000 laborers, naval service troops, and stragglers.⁵⁵ Only the men of the naval guard force were fully trained for ground combat.

In preparing the defenses of Roi-Namur, the enemy concentrated his weapons to cover probable landing areas, an arrangement in keeping with his goal of destroying the Americans in the water and on the beaches. The defenders, however, failed to take full advantage of the promontories on the lagoon shores of both Roi and Namur, sites from which deadly flanking fire might have been placed on the incoming landing craft. Both beach and antitank obstacles were comparatively few in number, although a series of antitank ditches and trenches extended across the lagoon side of Namur Island.⁵⁶ Ten pillboxes mounting 7.7mm machine guns, a 37mm rapid-fire gun, a pair of 13mm machine guns, and two 20mm cannon were scattered along the beaches over which General Schmidt intended to land. Most of these positions were connected by trenches. Although two pair of twin-mounted 127mm guns were emplaced on Namur, these weapons covered the

⁵³ Hattori, *Complete History*, v. 3, pp. 50-51; Sako Tanemura, *Confidential Diary of the Imperial General Staff Headquarters*, tr by 165th MIS Co, 1952, hereafter Tanemura, *Confidential Diary*.

⁵⁴ USSBS *Interrogation* Nav No. 30, Cdr Goro Matsuura, IJN, dtd 20Oct45, I, p. 132.

⁵⁵ The 4th Marine Division counted 3,472 enemy dead on the various islands in the northern part of the atoll. Since other bodies lay sealed in bunkers, it was impossible to reconstruct the exact strength of the various components of the Roi-Namur garrison.

⁵⁶ Metzger ltr.

ocean approaches to the island. The enemy had no integrated defenses within the coastal perimeter, but he could fight, on Namur at least, from a myriad of concrete shelters and storage buildings. (See Map V, Map Section.)

Kwajalein Island was the headquarters of Rear Admiral Monzo Akiyama's *6th Base Force*,⁵⁷ and its garrison was stronger in ground combat troops than that at Roi-Namur. About 1,000 soldiers, most of them from the Army *1st Amphibious Brigade*, fewer than 500 men of the Navy *61st Guard Force*, and a portion of a 250-man detachment from the *4th Special Naval Landing Force* were the most effective elements of the defense force. A few members of the base force headquarters and a thousand or more laborers also were available. In the southern part of the atoll, the enemy had some 5,000 men, fewer than 2,000 of them skilled combat troops.

The defenses on Kwajalein Island, like those on Roi-Namur, lacked depth and were strongest along the ocean coast. The western end of Kwajalein Island, where General Corlett planned to land, was guarded by 4 twin-mounted 127-mm guns (weapons emplaced to protect

the northwest corner of the island), 10 pillboxes, 9 machine gun emplacements, and a few yards of trenches. The cross-island defenses noted in aerial photographs actually consisted of an antitank ditch, a trench system, and seven machine gun positions. The trenches, though, began near a trio of 80mm guns that were aimed seaward. Although he had few prepared positions in the interior of the island, there were hundreds of buildings from which the enemy might harry the attackers.

Both of the principal objectives were weak in comparison to Betio Island. Few obstacles protected the assault beaches, and work on many installations was not yet finished. In spite of these deficiencies, the soldiers and Marines could expect bitter fighting. "When the last moment comes," vowed one of the atoll's defenders, "I shall die bravely and honorably."⁵⁸ In happy contrast to Kwajalein Atoll was Majuro, where a Navy warrant officer and a few civilians had been left behind when the Japanese garrison was withdrawn.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ JICPOA Item No. 5913, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Aerial photographs of Majuro showed a fair-sized barracks area. Since the atoll seemed to be abandoned, Admiral Spruance's chief of staff suggested to Admiral Hill that these buildings not be bombarded. They were found in excellent shape and were useful to U. S. Forces. *Moore comments Marshalls.*

⁵⁷ For a brief time just prior to the American attack, Vice Admiral Mashashi Kobayashi had maintained on the island temporary headquarters for his *Fourth Fleet*.

D-Day in the Marshalls¹

The final version of the FLINTLOCK plan called for three distinct operations, each of which required several amphibious landings. The capture of Majuro Atoll, correctly judged to be the simplest of the three, was entrusted to the VAC Reconnaissance Company and 2/106. Each of the others was believed to require an entire division.

In the northern part of Kwajalein Atoll, the 4th Marine Division had the mission of seizing on 31 January IVAN (Mellu), JACOB (Ennuebing), ALBERT (Ennumennet), ALLEN (Ennubir), and ABRAHAM (Ennugarret). On the following day, D plus 1, this division was scheduled to storm Roi-Namur. In the southern sector, the 7th Infantry Division was to attack CARTER (Gea), CECIL (Ninni), CARL-

SON (Ennubuj), and CARLOS (Ennylabegan) on D-Day, then assault the beaches of Kwajalein Island on 1 February. Once these principal objectives were secured, the assault divisions were to overcome enemy resistance throughout the remainder of the atoll. (See Map 8.)

MAJURO: BLOODLESS VICTORY²

An irregularly shaped collection of islands and partially submerged reefs, Majuro lies approximately 265 nautical miles southeast of Kwajalein Atoll. Majuro lagoon, 24 miles long by 5 miles wide, was a tempting prize, and Dalap Island, at the easternmost point of the atoll, seemed suitable for an airfield. Other large islands thought useful for military installations were Majuro, to the south, as well as Uliga and Darrit, just north of Dalap. Calalin and Eroj, midway along the northern rim of the atoll, were important, for they guarded the two entrances to the lagoon. (See Map 7.)

In planning the operation, Hill faced the problem of employing deep draft ships in an area for which he had only a small segment of a hydrographic chart. He ordered high angle vertical

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: TF 51 Rpt of FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE Ops, dtd 25Feb44, hereafter *TF 51 AR*; *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; *4th MarDiv AR* (which includes rpts of IVAN LdgGru, 23d, 24th, 25th, 14th, and 20th Mar); *4th MarDiv Jnl*, 13Jan-2eb44, hereafter *4th MarDiv Jnl*; *10th AmTracBn Rpt on FLINTLOCK*, dtd 12Apr44, hereafter *10th AmTracBn Rpt*; *1/25 Rpt of Activities, D-Day and D plus 1*, dtd 16Feb44; *2/25 Rpt of Activities*, dtd 20Feb44; *3/25 Hist*, 11Jan44-8Mar44, n.d.; *DesRon 1 AR*, dtd 9Feb44; *CominCh, Marshall Islands*; Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*; Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*.

² Additional sources for this section include: TG 51.2 Majuro AR, dtd 15Feb44; VAC ReconCo WarD, Majuro, dtd 16Mar44, Encl I to *VAC AR FLINTLOCK*.

aerial photographs made of the lagoon for use by a Coast and Geodetic Survey team attached to his staff and with its help prepared a detailed chart. With this as a navigation guide, he was able to move into the lagoon, once the operation was underway, without difficulty.³

To overwhelm what was known to be a small garrison, Admiral Hill could employ 2/106, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Frederick B. Sheldon, USA, and carried in the task group command ship, *Cambria*. This battalion had been reinforced by the VAC Reconnaissance Company led by Captain James L. Jones. To transport, protect, and defend his landing force, Hill had a heavy cruiser, four destroyers, two escort carriers, two destroyer transports, three minesweepers, and an LST.

One of the transports, the converted destroyer (APD) USS *Kane* left the convoy on 30 January to steam directly to the objective. That night, the ship reached the twin entrances to Majuro lagoon and by 2300 had landed a small detachment from the reconnaissance company. This group found both Eroj and Calalin to be unoccupied. A native told the Marines that 300–400 Japanese were located on Darrit, and this information was relayed to Admiral Hill at 0608. Other inhabitants of Calalin, however, had noted the withdrawal of the enemy troops. They reported that a lone warrant officer and a few civilians were the only Japanese in the atoll.

The *Kane* next landed the remainder of Jones' company on Dalap. Patrols fanned out over the island but discov-

ered no Japanese. At Uliga, an English-speaking native confirmed the earlier reports that the enemy garrison had been evacuated.

At this time, the reconnaissance company lost radio contact with the task force. Unaware that the enemy had abandoned Darrit, Admiral Hill ordered the USS *Portland* to shell the island at 0634. Within 20 minutes, contact was regained, the bombardment was stopped, and a scheduled air strike was cancelled. The troops then occupied Darrit, raising the American flag for the first time over prewar Japanese territory at 0955.⁴

On the night of 31 January, a platoon from Jones' company landed on Majuro Island and captured the naval warrant officer who was responsible for Japanese property left behind on the atoll. The civilians who assisted him in caring for the equipment escaped into the jungle. Thus ended the only action at Majuro Atoll.

About midnight on 1 February, a detachment of VAC Reconnaissance Company, investigating reports of a downed American plane, landed from the *Kane* on Arno Atoll, about 10 miles east of Majuro. The Marines found no Japanese, and natives told them that the plane crew had been removed to Maloelap. Reembarking their APD, the men returned to Majuro on the 2d.

NORTHERN KWAJALEIN: IVAN AND JACOB

During darkness on the morning of 31 January, ships of the Northern Attack Force steamed into position in the

³ Hill comments/interview Marshalls.

⁴ Ibid.

vicinity of Roi-Namur. The schedule for D-Day called first for the capture of IVAN and JACOB, two islands southwest of Roi-Namur, between which lay a deep-water passage into Kwajalein lagoon. Elements of Lieutenant Colonel Clarence J. O'Donnell's 1/25 were to land at 0900 on both objectives. For the day's action, the battalion had been reinforced with Company D, 4th Tank Battalion, the division's scout company. (See Map 8.)

Because they commanded the lagoon entrance, both IVAN and JACOB had to be attacked from the seaward side. Company B of O'Donnell's battalion was to assault Beach Blue 1 on JACOB, while Company C and the attached scout company struck Blue 2 on neighboring IVAN. Once these landings had been made, the ships supporting the IVAN force, led by mine sweepers, could enter the lagoon to carry out the remaining parts of the D-Day plan. In the meantime, artillery batteries from the 14th Marines would begin arriving on the Blue Beaches to move into positions from which to assist the next day's operation.

Unlike the men who were to make the main landings, the Marines of General Underhill's IVAN group had to transfer at sea from LCVPs to LVTs. O'Donnell's troops entered the landing craft at 0530 and began their journey to the transfer area where they would meet the LVTs of Company B, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion. The wind was brisk and the sea rough as the LCVPs plowed toward their rendezvous. By the time the boats reached the tractors, many of the assault troops were soaked by the spray.

The preparatory bombardment of northern Kwajalein Atoll got underway at 0651. In addition to shelling IVAN and JACOB, supporting warships pounded Roi-Namur and stood ready to blast ABRAHAM if necessary. Naval gunfire was lifted at 0715 to permit an 8-minute strike by carrier planes and then resumed.

During the battering of the northern islands, the remainder of Colonel Samuel C. Cumming's 25th Marines was preparing for action later in the day. Both 2/25, under Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson, and 3/25, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers, were scheduled to load into LCVPs. Hudson's battalion was to transfer to the LVTs of Company C, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and seize ALLEN. Tractors released by the IVAN and JACOB forces were to land Chambers' men on ALBERT. After overrunning ALBERT, 3/25 was to prepare to attack on order across the shallow strait separating that island from ABRAHAM.

At 0800, while 1/25 was forming to assault IVAN and JACOB, Admiral Conolly confirmed 0900 as H-Hour. He selected 1130 as A-Hour, the time of the landings on ALBERT and ALLEN, and designated 1600 as B-Hour, when Chambers' battalion would storm ABRAHAM. Adhering to this timetable, the supporting warships ceased firing at 0825 to permit a second aerial attack. At this point, the effects of choppy seas and makeshift rehearsals made themselves felt, and it soon became obvious to Admiral Conolly that the assault waves could not meet his deadline.

The postponement of H-Hour was

partially the fault of the elements. Swells, aided by a 14-knot wind, complicated the transfer of troops, cut the speed of the LVTs almost in half, and raised spray that drowned the radios carried by the tractors. Yet many of the misfortunes that hounded Company B, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, could be traced to the improvised rehearsals that had been held off the California coast.

"A rehearsal with complete plans and orders," the company commander later suggested, "would be of much value prior to D-Day landing."⁵ Unfortunately the tractor battalion had received the revised plans long after its final exercise.

For these reasons, the transfer area soon became the site of an amphibious traffic jam. Tractors were slow in leaving the LSTs, landing craft had difficulty in finding the proper amphibians, and rumored changes of plan could not be verified because of the drenched radios.⁶ Order, however, eventually prevailed, and the troop-laden LVTs were directed into formation.

Conolly, alerted by a destroyer astride the line of departure that the troop carriers were late, at 0903 issued orders delaying H-Hour until 0930. Within a few minutes of this change,

the LCI gunboats and LVT(A)s that were to spearhead the assault crossed the line of departure. Now the aerial observers and air coordinator undertook the task of timing the final strikes according to the progress of the approaching tractors.

"Will hold up attack until boats are in proper position," radioed the air coordinator at 0854 after he had noted that the approaching landing craft were 5,000-6,000 yards from IVAN and JACOB.⁷ At 0917, when the LVT(A)s and LCI gunboats were about 3,000 yards from shore, the coordinator ordered the waiting planes to begin their attack. The bombing attacks pinned down the defenders of both objectives until the LCIs were in position to launch their rockets. No strikes were made against the beaches while the rocket bombardment was being delivered, but when the LCIs had accomplished this task, the coordinator directed fighter planes to strafe the islands. Air observers kept close watch over the approaching troops and carefully reported the distance that remained to be covered. Since the force bound for JACOB made better speed, the final strafing of that island was halted shortly after 0940, while the final strike against IVAN continued past 1000.

As the bombing attacks were beginning, a 127mm battery on Roi rashly opened fire on warships supporting the preliminary landings. A cruiser silenced the enemy position but did not destroy the twin-mounted guns. For the time being, though, this threat was removed.

⁵ Rpt of CO, Co B, 10th AmTracBn, dtd 17Mar44, Encl A to 10th AmTracBn Rpt.

⁶ The transport division commander noted that the "short delay in How hour was the result of inability of certain LCVPs loaded with troops to locate the LVTs into which they were to transfer. Indications are that all LSTs were not in designated areas and that some LVTs wandered away from the launching LST." ComTransDiv 26 AR, ser no. 0013, dtd 18Feb44 (OAB, NHD).

⁷ 4th MarDiv Jnl, msg dtd 0854, 31Jan44.



105MM AMMUNITION is unloaded from landing craft at Mellu Island for the bombardment of Roi-Namur. (USA SC324729)



24TH MARINES assault troops on the beach at Namur await the word to move inland. (USMC 70450)

"Good luck to the first Marines to land on Japanese soil," radioed Colonel Cumming to the elements of his regiment that were approaching JACOB and IVAN.⁸ The gunboats halted, the armored LVTs passed through the line of LCIs to take up positions just off the beach at JACOB, and at 0952 the tractors carrying Company B, 1/25, rumbled onto the island. Off neighboring IVAN, Company C and the attached scouts were encountering serious difficulties.

A rugged segment of reef, brisk winds, and adverse seas had slowed to a crawl the speed of the LVTs carrying Company C. Continuous strafing attacks prevented the defenders of IVAN from taking advantage of the delay, but the persistent battery on Roi resumed firing until silenced a second time. Finally, Colonel Cumming was able to hasten the landing by diverting the tractors carrying the scout company around the island and onto its lagoon beaches.⁹

While Company C was struggling in vain to reach the ocean shore, the scouts at 0955 landed on southeastern beaches of IVAN and set up a skirmish line facing toward the north. A few minutes later, a regimental staff officer reached Company C and directed it to land in the wake of the scout company. At 1015, the tardy company landed to support the scouts.¹⁰

The fighting on JACOB and IVAN was brief and not especially violent.

⁸ *4th MarDiv Jnl*, msg dtd 0920, 31Jan44. Actually, the VAC Reconnaissance Company had already begun the conquest of Majuro.

⁹ MajGen Samuel C. Cumming interview with HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 24Nov52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

JACOB was overrun within a quarter of an hour. After the mop up that followed, a total of 17 enemy dead, 8 of them apparent suicides, were found on the island. Two prisoners were taken. IVAN yielded 13 dead and 3 prisoners.¹¹

As soon as the two islands were secured, LVTs from Company A, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion began landing elements of the 14th Marines. The 75mm howitzers of 3/14 were carried to JACOB in the tractors and a few LCVPs. Equipped with 105mm howitzers, weapons too bulky to be carried by LVTs, 4/14 landed from LCMs on IVAN. IVAN was selected for the command post of the Colonel Louis G. DeHaven's artillery regiment, but sites on JACOB were chosen by the commanding officers of both the 25th Marines and 1/25.

ALLEN, ALBERT, AND ABRAHAM

Once 1/25 had seized IVAN and JACOB, the scene of action shifted across the lagoon to ALLEN, ALBERT, and ABRAHAM, three islands that ascend the northeastern rim of the atoll toward Roi-Namur. This trio of islands was needed to serve as artillery positions and to secure the flank of the boat waves that would assault the main objective. General Underhill's IVAN Landing Group, the conqueror of IVAN and JACOB, had also been assigned to make these later landings. When landing on ALLEN and ALBERT, the assault forces were to strike from the lagoon, but 3/25 was to approach

¹¹ *Ibid.*; LtCol Arthur E. Buck, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 21Jan53; LtCol Michael J. Davidowitch ltr to CMC, dtd 26Nov52.

ABRAHAM by moving parallel to and just inside the reef.

A-Hour, the time of the landings on ALLEN and ALBERT, had been tentatively set by Admiral Conolly for 1130. The manner of execution was similar to that used during the earlier D-Day landings. One destroyer was assigned to support each of the two assault battalions, while rockets from LCIs, automatic weapons from LVT-(A)s, and the strafing by aircraft insured the neutralization of the beaches.

The Marines of 2/25, chosen as reserve for the IVAN-JACOB phase of the operation, had loaded into LCVPs at 0530 and within two hours had completed their transfer to LVTs. They spent the remainder of the morning being rocked ceaselessly by the pitching waves. More fortunate were Chambers' men, for they did not begin loading in LCVPs until after dawn. Almost two hours were lost when the transport carrying the battalion was twice forced to get underway in order to maintain station in the buffeting seas. During the morning, the landing craft carrying 3/25 plowed through the swells to the vicinity of the transfer area where they were to meet tractors returning from the IVAN and JACOB landings.

Once they had embarked in the landing craft, the men of 3/25 were as roughly treated by the sea as their fellow Marines of Hudson's battalion. "The sea was not too calm," reads the report of 3/25, "and as a result, many of the Marines found themselves wishing the boats would head for the beach instead of circling in the transport area."¹² The men did not get their

wish, but at midday the LCVPs moved the short distance to the transfer area. Here the unit encountered still other misadventures.

In spite of the morning's delays, Admiral Conolly believed that 1430, three hours later than his earlier estimate, was an attainable A-Hour. The passes into the lagoon and the boat lanes were cleared by minesweepers, and supporting ships continued the bombardment of ALLEN, ALBERT, and Roi-Namur. Namur in particular rocked under the hammering of naval guns, but Roi was not slighted. Admiral Conolly signaled to the warships blasting Roi: "Desire *Maryland* move in really close this afternoon for counterbattery and counter blockhouse fire. . . ."¹³ This message earned the admiral his nickname of "Close-in" Conolly.

As the minesweepers were clearing JACOB Pass, they had discovered that it was too shallow to permit the entry of the destroyer *Phelps*, the control vessel for all the D-Day landings. As a result, the ship was routed through IVAN Pass, for it was thought necessary to have the *Phelps* inside the lagoon in time to protect the ships sweeping mines from the boat lanes leading to the objectives. The *LCC 33*, a specially equipped shallow-draft vessel, had been selected to shepherd the assault craft in the absence of the destroyer, but the alternate control craft failed to learn of the change in plans. As a result, responsibility for control temporarily passed to *SC 997*,

¹² 3/25 Hist, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹³ 4th MarDiv Jnl, msg dtd 1210, 31Jan44. At one point on the afternoon of 31 January, the *Maryland* moved to within 1,000 yards of Roi.

the submarine chaser in which General Underhill and his staff had embarked.

Although the general had neither copies of the control plan nor adequate radio channels to coordinate the movement of the waves, he attempted to restore order. First, the SC 997 rounded up the tractors carrying 2/25, which had mistakenly attempted to follow the *Phelps*. These strays, as well as some LVTs carrying 3/25 that had wandered from their proper station, were herded back to the transfer area.

The naval officers assigned to guide the various waves cooperated to the best of their ability in reorganizing the assault force, and Admiral Conolly soon steamed onto the scene to supervise. "This was to prove," the admiral commented, "the only case in my experience before or later where I had any difficulty controlling the craft making the landing."¹⁴

While the waves were being reformed in the transfer area, a few additional LVTs arrived, and these were used to carry Marines of 3/25. There were, however, enough tractors for less than half of Chambers' battalion.¹⁵ By now, JACOB Pass was known to be free of mines, so, rather than wait for additional LVTs, General Underhill ordered both battalions to follow the submarine chaser through the passage toward the line of departure.

The *Phelps*, which had finished her support mission, was now nearing the

line of departure within the lagoon where she would again take over as control vessel. Observers in the destroyer viewed the progress of the approaching tractors and reported to Admiral Conolly that A-Hour could not be met.¹⁶ He then postponed the time of the landings to 1500.

The delay imposed a strain on the system of aerial control, for the planes assigned to attack just prior to the landings could not be held on station for the additional 30 minutes. Such a decision would have disrupted the schedule worked out for the carriers and possibly have prevented later flights from arriving on time. To insure complete coverage throughout the day, the Commander Support Aircraft directed the planes then on station to attack targets of opportunity. The relieving flight of bombers was employed to support the landings, but it seemed that no fighters would be on hand to deliver the final strafing. The combat air patrol on station over the northern part of the atoll lacked enough fuel for the attack. Fortunately, another group of fighters arrived as the landings were about to begin. Since these relief pilots were familiar with the air support plan and the radar screen was free of hostile aircraft, they were able to sweep low over the islands and keep the enemy pinned down during the crucial moments just prior to the assault.

At 1432, the assault waves began

¹⁴ VAdm Richard L. Conolly ltr to CMC, dtd 26Nov52.

¹⁵ Rpt of CG, IVAN LdgGru, dtd 29Feb44, Encl C to 4th MarDiv AR, p. 4, states that 1½ waves were in LVTs, but 3/25 History, *op. cit.*, p. 4, says three or four.

¹⁶ Admiral Conolly reported that the slow progress of the tractors was "due to the low speed of the LVTs proceeding against the wind and the inexperienced LVT drivers permitting their vehicles to drift down wind while waiting for waves to form up." *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*, p. 5.

crossing the line of departure along which the *Phelps* had taken station. The LCI(G)s led the way, followed by armored amphibians and finally by the troop-carrying LVTs. The gunboats discharged their rockets, raked the beaches with cannon fire, and got clear of the boat lanes. Company D, 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion, plunged past the LCIs to maintain the neutralization of the islands with fire from cannon and machine guns. The supporting destroyers ceased their shelling to permit planes to execute the revised schedule of aerial strikes, and at 1510 3/25 reached ALBERT. The Marines of 2/25 landed on ALLEN just five minutes later.

Both objectives were quickly taken. Chambers' 3d Battalion secured ALBERT by 1542, killing 10 Japanese in the process at a cost of 1 Marine killed and 7 wounded. Hudson's men, their progress impeded by the dense undergrowth in the northern part of ALLEN, needed help from a platoon of tanks to wipe out the Japanese platoon defending the island. By 1628, ALLEN too had been captured.

When it became apparent that Company G, Hudson's reserve, would not be needed at ALLEN, that unit was dispatched to ANDREW (Obella). The unit landed at 1545 and found the island unoccupied. Although opposition had so far been light, the operation had moved slowly. Before darkness, ABRAHAM had to be seized and additional artillery landed.

After a prolonged stay in the rough seas of the lagoon, 1/14 and 2/14 with 75mm pack howitzers came ashore on ALBERT and ALLEN in time to move into firing positions just before

dark. Registration, however, was postponed until the morning of D-Day. Although the weapons were emplaced promptly, Colonel William W. Rogers, division chief of staff, was not entirely pleased with the conduct of this phase of the operation. He felt that not enough ammunition was on hand at ALBERT and ALLEN. Forced to buck heavy seas all the way from the transport area to the islands, many of the LVTs that were loaded with ammunition had run out of gas short of their destination. Tractors, however, labored throughout the night to ferry an adequate number of artillery rounds to ALBERT and ALLEN.¹⁷

While the howitzer battalions were preparing to land, Chambers was readying 3/25 for the seizure of ABRAHAM, the last of the day's objectives. Although this island was not to be a site for howitzer batteries, its capture was important, for Japanese guns emplaced there could fire into the flanks of the assault waves bound for Roi-Namur.¹⁸ Chambers, however, had a difficult time mounting the attack.

The battalion commander suddenly found himself desperately short of assault craft. Because the amphibian tractor unit had received no orders concerning the ABRAHAM landing, its vehicles withdrew to refuel immediately after ALBERT had fallen.¹⁹ The only tractors that remained behind were the two that carried Chambers and his headquarters.

¹⁷ MajGen William W. Rogers ltr to Dir DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 3Feb48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Croizat ltr.

Admiral Conolly had directed that the attack upon ABRAHAM be launched at 1600 or as soon thereafter as practicable. B-Hour had already passed when Colonel Cumming landed on ALBERT to confer with the battalion commander on the quickest method of completing the D-Day operations. Chambers decided to attack at 1800 if landing craft were available by then. Three self-propelled 75mm guns from the Regimental Weapons Company, the battalion's attached 37mm guns, and its organic mortars were to support the landing.

Prior to the advance against ABRAHAM, 3/25 occupied ALBERT JUNIOR, a tiny island 200 yards north of ALBERT. Although no Japanese were posted on ALBERT JUNIOR, the ABRAHAM garrison opened fire on the occupation force. Machine guns were then mounted on the island to support the scheduled landing.

A patrol waded toward ABRAHAM and returned with information concerning the route over which Chambers would attack. In the meantime, the battalion commander had gained the services of two additional tractors that wandered near the ALBERT beaches. He decided to load 120 of his Marines into the four amphibians, dispatch them in a single wave to seize a small beachhead, and then use the same vehicles to shuttle the remainder of his troops across the shallow strait.

The assault began on schedule. A smoke screen laid by the battalion 81-mm mortars concealed the approaching LVTs, and the enemy chose not to defend the southern beaches. By 1830 two companies had reached the island and carved out a beachhead 250 yards

deep. In 45 minutes, the island was under American control, but mopping-up continued into the night. Six Japanese were killed on ABRAHAM; one Marine was wounded during a misdirected strafing attack by a friendly plane.²⁰

Since this last objective was a scant 400 yards from the southeast shoreline of Namur, it could provide a base of fire for the next morning's attack. During the night, as many weapons as possible were rushed into position. By morning, 5 self-propelled 75mm guns, 17 37mm antitank guns, 4 81mm mortars, 9 60mm mortars, and 61 machine guns stood ready to assist planes, ships, and field pieces in their deadly work.

General Underhill's IVAN Landing Group had executed all its D-Day assignments, but the operation had not been without its flaws. Writing some years after FLINTLOCK, an officer of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion attempted to analyze the work of his battalion in northern Kwajalein. During World War II, he served at Guadalcanal and Saipan as well as in the Marshalls and as a result felt "somewhat qualified to appreciate confusion." He maintained that the period from the organization of his unit through the securing of Roi-Namur was the most exhausting both physically and mentally of any operation in which he took part.²¹

The numerous landings scheduled for

²⁰ This account of the ABRAHAM landing is based on an interview with Colonel Justice M. Chambers, dtd 6May48, cited in Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*, pp. 50-52. No transcript of the interview is available.

²¹ *Croizat ltr.*

D-Day placed a grave burden on the LVTs, their crews, and the officers who were to control their employment. The control system, moreover, depended upon reliable communications, and the radios carried in the tractors were vulnerable to water damage. In a heavy sea, such damage was unavoidable.

In commenting on the employment of LVTs on 31 January, the 4th Division chief of staff observed that problems were anticipated and tentative plans were made to insure the success of the operation. He wrote:

The Commanding General and Staff of the Northern Landing Force were well aware that things might not go as planned on D-Day. In fact the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion was withheld entirely on D-Day in spite of urgent requests from subordinate units, in order that we would be sure to be able to land the 23d Marines on Roi on D+1, either from the outside or from the inside of the lagoon. In other words, it was considered that the mission could have been accomplished by the capture of IVAN and JACOB and the subsequent landing on Roi by the 23d Marines utilizing the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, even if the landings on the east side of the lagoon had not been possible on D-Day. This would have involved the subsequent capture of Namur by assault from Roi, with or without a landing from the lagoon. Possession of the Eastern Islands naturally made the entire operation easier.²³

In the words of Admiral Conolly, the plan for D-Day, "under the sea conditions prevailing, was . . . too complicated and beyond the state of training and discipline of the LVT units to execute *smoothly*, especially when the

unexpected complications were imposed. However, the plans were made to work and that is the final test of a command and its organization."²³ In spite of the unfavorable seas, the difficult reefs, and the lapse in control that occurred while the *Phelps* entered the lagoon, the Marines had taken all their objectives. More reliable radios, closer cooperation between LSTs and LVTs, and a tighter rein by control officers would have resulted in a less hectic operation, but these facts were of no consolation to the Japanese killed on the outlying islands.

*THE ARMY IN SOUTHERN KWAJALEIN*²⁴

On D-Day, while the Marines were seizing the islands near Roi-Namur, General Corlett's Army troops were to make a similar series of landings in the immediate vicinity of Kwajalein Island. The 7th Reconnaissance Troop, reinforced by part of the garrison force, men from Company B, 111th Infantry, was scheduled to occupy CECIL (Ninni) and CARTER (Gea), two small islands believed to be undefended. When this task was done, the troop might be called upon to reconnoiter CHAUNCEY (Gehh) not far from CECIL. CARLSON (Enubuj), which was thought to be defended by a force of 250-300, and less formidable CARLOS (Ennylabegan) were the objectives of the 17th Infantry. (See Map 8.)

²³ Conolly ltr, *op.cit.*

²⁴ A detailed account of Army operations on D-Day may be found in Crowl and Love, *The Marshalls and Gilberts*, pp. 219-229.

²³ BGen William W. Rogers ltr to CMC, dtd 1Dec52.

Although artillery was to be emplaced on CARLSON only, all of these islands figured in General Corlett's plans. CECIL and CARTER were important because they bounded a passage into the lagoon, while a wider deep-water channel lay between CARLOS and CARLSON. In addition, CARLOS was considered a suitable site for the 7th Infantry Division supply dumps.

The invasion of southern Kwajalein, like the operation in the north, was not without its moments of frustration. Attempting to land from rubber boats on a moonless night, that portion of the reconnaissance troop destined for CARTER started off toward neighboring CECIL. The error was detected, the men landed on the correct island, and after a brief fire fight they secured the objective.

While the APD USS *Manley* was launching the boats bound for CARTER, her sister ship USS *Overton* was attempting to locate CECIL. "Intelligence received gave a good picture of both Gea and Ninni Islands," reported the skipper of the *Overton*, "but little of Gehh, the contour of which was, in a way, similar to Ninni."²⁵ In the darkness, the attackers mistook CHAUNCEY (Gehh) for CECIL (Ninni) and landed there instead. A brief skirmish followed, but before the island had been secured General Corlett learned of the error and ordered the reconnaissance troop to move to the proper island.

Leaving a small force to contain the Japanese on CHAUNCEY, the soldiers re-embarked and occupied CECIL

shortly after noon. The group left behind soon encountered a larger number of the enemy and had to be withdrawn. Taking CHAUNCEY was postponed until an adequate force was available.

Off the two objectives assigned to the 17th Infantry, the assault waves began forming in the morning darkness. Poor visibility resulted in confusion, and the attack had to be postponed from 0830 to 0910. At CARLOS, 1/17 landed without opposition and rapidly overran the mile-long island. The few defenders, who lacked prepared positions from which to fight, were either killed or captured. The Americans suffered no casualties.

The CARLSON landing force, 2/17, expected to meet skillfully organized resistance. The LVTs carrying the assault waves reached the island at 0912, and the soldiers promptly began moving inland. Contrary to intelligence estimates, not a single Japanese was found on the island, although 24 Korean laborers were taken prisoner. The most serious opposition came from artillery on Kwajalein Island, but these pieces were silenced by naval gunfire before they could do the attackers any harm.

Army artillery, four battalions of 105mm howitzers and a battalion of 155mm howitzers, promptly landed on CARLSON, moved into position, and began registering. Some of the lighter pieces fired for effect during the night, but not all of the 155mm howitzers were emplaced when darkness fell. Meanwhile, a medical collecting station and LVT maintenance shop were being set up on CARLOS.

In spite of the numerous delays, the D-Day landings in both the north and

²⁵ USS *Overton* AR, dtd 8Feb44, p. 4.

south had been successful. Roi-Namur and Kwajalein Islands had been isolated, battered, and brought within range of field artillery. The enemy garrisons were given no rest during the night, for warships continued shelling the objectives. Although Army 105s joined in the shelling of Kwajalein Island, the Marine howitzers, scheduled to register at dawn on Roi-Namur,

were temporarily silent. Under cover of darkness, Underwater Demolition Teams examined the assault beaches at both islands. Neither mines nor other artificial obstacles were found. The way was clear for the next day's operations.²⁶

²⁶ Com V PhibFor msg to CinCPac, ser no. 00334, dtd 13Mar44 (AR File, OAB, NHD).

FLINTLOCK: Completing the Conquest¹

On D plus 1, after the capture of the outlying islands, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division was to storm Roi-Namur. At Roi, where the enemy had built an airfield, Colonel Louis R. Jones would land two reinforced battalions of the 23d Marines on the Red Beaches along the lagoon coast of the island. Namur, to the east of the sandspit that joined the twin islands, was the objective of another reinforced regiment, the 24th Marines, commanded by Colonel Franklin A. Hart. There two assault battalions were to strike northward across the island after landing on the Green Beaches. LVTs of the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion were to carry the Roi battalions, and the

Marines destined for Namur would rely on the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, veteran of the D-Day landings. (See Maps 9 and 10.)

LAND THE LANDING FORCE

Admiral Conolly and his staff were quick to profit from the mistakes of D-Day. The long journey through heavy seas from the transfer area to the beaches had been too much for the short-legged LVTs.² The original plan for D plus 1 called for the landing force to transfer to LSTs and there load in the tractors. When the Marines had entered the assault craft, the parent LSTs were to lower their ramps and launch the tractors. The LVTs would then battle the waves to enter the lagoon, move to a position off the objective, and form for the assault. Although this plan spared the troops the discomfort of transferring at sea from one type of landing craft to another, it did not reduce the distance which the tractors had to travel. To avoid the delays of D-Day and move the LVTs closer to their line of departure, Conolly invoked his rough weather plan. The troop transfer arrangement was left unchanged, but the LSTs were

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; *VAC AR FLINTLOCK*; *4th MarDiv Ar*; *4th MarDiv Jnl*; 4th MarDiv CommOpsRpts, dtd 29Mar44; 4th MarDiv D-3 Rpts, 31Jan-12Feb44; 7th InfDiv Rpt of Participation in FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 8Feb44; 7th InfDiv SAR, Kwajalein Island, dtd 27Mar44; 20th Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 16Mar44; 23d Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 4Mar44; 23d Mar Jnl, 31Jan-4Feb44; 24th Mar Prelim Rpts on Roi-Namur Op, dtd 10Feb44 (including rpts of 1/24, 2/24, and 3/24); 1/23 OpRpt, dtd 10Feb44; 2/23 OpRpt, dtd 14Feb44; 3/23 Rec of Events, 31Jan-5Feb44, dtd 12Feb44; 1st Armd PhibBn, Cmts on LVT(A) (1)s during FLINTLOCK Ops, dtd 3Feb44; 4th TkBn Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 20Apr44; *10th AmTracBn Rpt*; Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*.

² The LVT(2)s had only power-driven bilge pumps. When the gasoline supply was exhausted, these failed, and the unfortunate vehicle usually foundered.

directed to enter the lagoon before launching their tractors.³

This change, however, could not prevent a repetition of many of the difficulties that had marred the D-Day landings. The principal offenders were the LVTs and LSTs, for the two types did not cooperate as well as they should have. The troubles of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion began on the night of 31 January as its vehicles were returning from ALBERT and ALLEN.

Some of the parent LSTs failed to display the pre-arranged lights, so that many tractors became lost in the gathering darkness. The boats that were to guide the LVTs fared no better, and the battalion soon became disorganized. Since the tractors did not carry identifying pennants, the LST crews could not easily determine which vehicles had been entrusted to their care. Concerned that they would be unable to refuel their own LVTs, the captains of a few landing ships refused to give gasoline to strangers. The commander of the tractor battalion felt that the trouble stemmed from the feeling, apparently shared by many of the LST sailors, that the LVTs were boats rather than amphibious vehicles. "They should be made to appreciate the fact that LVTs are not boats," he admonished, "cannot maneuver or operate in the manner of boats, nor are they tactically organized in the manner of boat units."⁴

³ Rough Weather AltnPlan, dtd 26Jan44, Anx V to TF 53 OpO A157-44, dtd 8Jan44.

⁴ 10th AmTracBn Rpt, p. 2. At the conclusion of the operation, the action reports of the transport division commander and Admiral Conolly both voiced the view the LVTs used

Although the bulk of the battalion vehicles either reached the haven of the LSTs or remained for the night on one of the captured islands, seven tractors were not yet accounted for when FLINTLOCK ended.⁵ As dawn approached, the battalion commander realized that the LSTs had not retrieved enough tractors to execute the morning's operations. He notified Admiral Conolly who put into effect a replacement scheme. The company commander, Company A, 11th Amphibian Tractor Battalion was ordered to send a specific number of LVTs to certain of the landing ships to make up the shortage.

The ordeal of the 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion did not affect the preparations of the Roi-Namur landing force. As soon as there was daylight enough for safe navigation, the LSTs carrying the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion began threading their way into the lagoon. At 0650, the old battleship USS *Tennessee* opened fire against a blockhouse on the sandspit that linked Roi with Namur, while other vessels commenced hammering Namur. The bombardment of Roi, delayed by the passage of LSTs between the support units and the island, began at 0710. Carrier planes arrived over the twin islands, and howitzers of the 14th Marines joined in the shelling. W-Hour, the hour of the landings, was set for 1000.

Meanwhile, the LSTs had arrived in

for assault waves should be regarded and organized as boats and manned by carefully-trained Navy crews. TF 53 AR Roi-Namur, p. 10; ComTransDiv 26 AR, *op. cit.*

⁵ 10th AmphTracBn Rpt of LVT(2) Activities in Kwajalein Op, dtd 17Feb44, p. 2.

position to disgorge the tractors assigned to the 23d Marines. Like those LVTs used on D-Day, the tractors loaded on the weather decks of the ships had to be lowered by elevators to join the vehicles stored on the tank decks and then be sent churning toward the beaches. Before the convoy sailed, tests had shown that the LVT(2)s were too long for the elevators. As a result, an inclined wooden plane was built on the elevator platform. If the tractor was driven up this ramp, it was sufficiently tilted to pass down the opening with a few inches to spare. Maneuvering the vehicles into position was a time-consuming job, an impossible task unless clutch and transmission were working perfectly. Yet, this was the only method of getting these LVTs into the water.

The elevator in one LST broke down midway through the launching, leaving nine tractors stranded on the weather deck. The Marines assigned to these vehicles were sent to the tank deck and placed, a few at a time, in the LVTs loading there. On another LST, the ramp was so steep that few vehicles could negotiate it. Drivers pulled as far up the incline as they could, then stopped, while a crew of men with a cutting torch trimmed the splash fenders at the rear of the tractors until clearance was obtained.⁶

At 0825, all fire-support ships had acknowledged Conolly's message confirming 1000 as W-Hour, but within a few minutes General Schmidt was sending Colonel Hart some disquieting news. "We are short 48 LVTs as of 0630," the

commanding officer of the 24th Marines had reported. The commanding general now replied: "Every effort being made to get LVTs. Use LCVPs for rear waves and transfer when LVTs are available."⁷ A two-hour search for amphibian tractors proved fruitless. Because of the night's confusion, the necessary number of LVTs was not at hand.

Both regiments were falling behind schedule, although sailors and Marines alike were trying desperately to get the assault craft into formation. When Admiral Conolly asked the commander of the transport group if a postponement was necessary, he immediately received the reply: "Relative to your last transmission, affirmative."⁸ At 0853, the time of the attack was delayed until 1100.

The schedule of fires was adjusted to meet this new deadline, and the task of destruction continued. At 0925, another crisis arose. A salvage boat sent to ABRAHAM by the transport USS *Biddle* reported: "Japs are counterattacking from CAMOUFLAGE. Send support immediately."⁹ This message was instantly relayed to Conolly, and even though aerial observers could not locate the enemy troop concentration, the admiral took no chances. Torpedo bombers, warships, and artillery batteries hurled high explosives into the southern part of Namur, but by

⁷ CO 24th Mar msg to CG 4th MarDiv, dtd 0630, 1Feb44 and CG 4th MarDiv msg to CO 24th Mar, dtd 0830, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁸ ComTransGru msg to CTF 53, dtd 0841, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁹ SalvBoat 8 msg to *Biddle*, dtd 0925, 1Feb44, 4th MarDiv Jnl.

⁶ *Croizat ltr*; Maj Theodore M. Garhart ltr to CMC, dtd 14Nov52.

1000 it was clear that the report of a counterattack had been incorrect.

When this sudden flurry of action ended, support ships returned to their tasks, firing deliberately and accurately until 1026 when the shelling was stopped to permit an airstrike. A glide-bombing attack followed by strafing runs kept the enemy occupied. As the planes were departing, the naval bombardment resumed.

Colonel Jones arrived at the line of departure 15 minutes before W-Hour. Although he had ample time to transfer with his staff to the pair of LVTs that had been assigned him, the tractors could not be found. He eventually would land from an LCVP.¹⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Dillon's 2/23, the force destined for Red 3, loaded into LVTs, left the LSTs, and then moved to the line of departure without waiting for the other assault battalion. Within a few minutes, 1/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hewin O. Hammond, had reached the line and begun the final adjustment of its formation prior to the storming of Red 2. Somehow, Hammond's battalion had failed to learn of the postponement of W-Hour, and the men of the unit felt that they "failed miserably" to meet the deadline.¹¹ Actually they were a few minutes ahead of schedule. (See Map 9.)

W-Hour came, then passed and still the 23d Marines remained at the line of departure. Although Jones' troops were ready, Hart's 24th Marines was not. Since 0630, control officers had

been trying without success to round up enough LVTs to carry the two assault battalions of the regiment. The transport group commander began releasing LCVPs to Hart, but contacting the boats and directing a sufficient number to the proper LSTs were difficult tasks. In spite of Admiral Conolly's decision to delay the attack, the Namur landing force needed still more time.

Hart soon became convinced that his assault waves could not possibly cross the line of departure in time to complete the 33-minute run to the Green Beaches by 1100. He requested another postponement and received word that "W-hour would be delayed until the combat team could make an orderly attack." This message led him to assume that "he was to report when his waves were in position and ready to move."¹² Satisfied that his schedule had been made more flexible, the regimental commander began making last-minute changes in the composition of his assault waves.

Because of the shortage of amphibian tractors, neither 3/24, the battalion destined for Green 1, nor 2/24, which was to attack Green 2, had enough LVTs for all its rifle companies. Lieutenant Colonel Francis H. Brink, commanding 2/24, noted that the company scheduled to remain in reserve had its full quota of vehicles, so he designated it as an assault company and placed the unit with the fewest tractors in reserve. Lieutenant Colonel Austin R. Brunelli of 3/24 ordered the tractors assigned to his

¹⁰ BGen Louis R. Jones ltr to Dir, Div-PubInfo, HQMC, dtd 11Apr49.

¹¹ 1/23 OpRpt, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² 24th Mar Rpt of FLINTLOCK Op, p. 7, dtd 10Mar44, Encl D to 4th MarDiv AR.

reserve to be divided between the assault companies. (See Map 10.)

When the two battalions reached the line of departure, each was but two companies strong. Control officers assigned to work with 2/24 found the situation especially confusing, for Company E, the unit originally designated battalion reserve and consigned to the fourth wave, was now the left element on the second and third waves. Additional time was lost as the company commander attempted in vain to explain the change, but his unit finally was formed in a single wave as the discarded plan had directed.¹³

To replace the absent reserves, Colonel Hart turned to Lieutenant Colonel Aquilla J. Dyess, commanding officer of 1/24, the regimental reserve, and ordered him to release one company to each of the assault battalions. While the LCVPs carrying these two units were moving into position, the third rifle company rejoined 2/24. The arrival of this unit, embarked in seven LVTs and two LCVPs,¹⁴ brought Brink's battalion up to full strength. As a result, one of Dyess' companies was returned.

While the composition of the Namur assault force was thus being altered,

¹³ LtCol John F. Ross, Jr. ltr to Head, HistBr, HQMC, dtd 21Jan53. Commenting on the differing solutions to this problem of the shortage of tractors, the commander of 2/24 believed in retrospect, that Brunelli's procedure "was probably better than mine. At the time," he noted, "I considered shifting tractors between scattered LSTs a time-consuming project in which I could lose control of some I already had." BGen Francis H. Brink ltr to ACofs, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Oct62, hereafter *Brink ltr.*

¹⁴ *Brink ltr.*

Colonel Jones' Marines were waiting impatiently at the line of departure. At 1107, the colonel asked the control vessel *Phelps* why the attack was being delayed. Five minutes later, the red flag dropped from the yardarm of the destroyer, the signal which was to send both regiments toward their objective.¹⁵ LCI gunboats, armored amphibians, and finally the LVTs carrying the assault battalions charged toward Roi. At 1150, naval gunfire was lifted from the Red Beaches, the gunboats and armored amphibians fired as long as the safety of the incoming troops permitted, and at 1157 the 23d Marines was reported to have reached Roi.

The signal to launch the attack came as a surprise to Colonel Hart, for he was under the impression that his regiment would not make its assault until all its elements were in position. He attempted to intercept Brunelli's 3/24, which had responded to the control ship signal, but when he saw that the regiment on his left was moving toward Roi, he realized that such an

¹⁵ Admiral Conolly noted that the order to execute this signal "was a command decision made by me after consultation with General Schmidt and with his full concurrence. With the information on hand that the 24th RCT had two battalions formed, and considering the already delayed How Hour and other factors such as gasoline consumption in the waiting tractors, and the waning effects of the bombardment, the Landing Force commander and I had to reach a decision to wait further or go ahead. The decision to go ahead was a calculated risk of the kind responsible commanders must make in time of war." VAdm Richard L. Connolly ltr to Dr. Jeter A. Isely, dtd 31Aug49, encl to Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 22Oct62.

action would only add to the confusion. Preceded by LCI(G)s and LVT(A)s, the first waves reached Namur at 1155. The weapons emplaced on ABRAHAM supported the landing of the 24th Marines.

The four battalions that stormed Roi-Namur benefited from an experiment in air support directed by the air coordinator. Bomber pilots who were to participate in the strikes just prior to W-Hour were warned to remain above 2,000 feet. At this altitude, above the maximum ordinate of artillery, naval gunfire, and rockets, they could attack while the other supporting weapons were firing.

Just as the carefully arranged bombing attack was to begin, a rain squall blanketed the area east of the islands where the aircraft were on station. For a time, it seemed that the strike would have to be cancelled, but an opening in the clouds was spotted from the bridge of the *Appalachian*. The Commander, Support Aircraft was notified, and the planes were directed to the rift in the clouds west of Roi-Namur. The bombers were able to change station and complete their runs by the time the first wave was 750 yards from the beaches.

This technique assured the assault troops of a "thorough, accurate, and continuous bombing attack . . . during the critical approach phase."¹⁶ Since

¹⁶ AirSpt: FLINTLOCK, n.d., Encl C to TF 53 AR Roi-Namur. The commander of 2/14, located with his forward observer party on ABRAHAM, witnessed one success of this bombing attack. Planes hit a blockhouse on the eastern end of Namur, which had been "barely visible because of the surrounding jungle. After the bomb drop, it was com-

the naval bombardment was not lifted during the bombing attack, air support on 1 February was more effective than that given on the previous day. When the war had reached the Marianas, coordinated attacks such as this one would become commonplace.

"THIS IS A PIP:" THE CONQUEST OF ROI

Red Beach 2, the objective of Lieutenant Colonel Hammond's 1/23, seemed to be a stoutly defended strip of coral. The battalion zone of action was bounded on the left by Wendy Point, the westernmost tip of the island, and extended on the right to a point within 200 yards of Tokyo pier. The enemy appeared to have built heavy blockhouses on the point and scattered pillboxes along the beach. What was believed to be another blockhouse had been erected not far from the right limit of the zone. (See Map 9 and Map V, Map Section.)

Since flanking fire could be delivered from Wendy Point, that portion of the beachhead had to be secured as quickly as possible. Once the fangs of the blockhouses had been drawn, Hammond's battalion was to attack in the eastern part of its zone to aid the advance of the adjacent 2d Battalion. Armored amphibians played a spectacular role in executing this plan.

Admiral Conolly had not specified whether the armored amphibian bat-

pletely denuded of trees and Japanese military personnel rushed from the blockhouse in an apparent daze. These men were picked off by the Marines stationed on the forward part of ABRAHAM." BGen John B. Wilson, Jr. ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 15Oct62.

talion would support the landings from positions off the beaches or from the island itself. The officer in command of the assault regiment could decide how these vehicles might give the more effective support and place them accordingly.¹⁷ At Red 2 the tractors thundered ashore at 1133, several minutes ahead of the first wave of LVT(2)s, moved inland to seek hull defilade, and turned their 37mm cannon against the Wendy Point fortifications. Companies A and B of Hammond's command were both ashore by 1158. While Company A pushed toward the point, Company B began its advance toward the farthest edge of the runway to its front.

The battalion landed slightly out of position, with the companies somewhat bunched toward the left of the zone. This misalignment was caused when the tractors carrying the adjacent battalion had veered westward from the proper boat lanes. The Marines, however, met only scant fire at Red 2 and advanced with ease to their first objective, the 0-1 Line.

Armored amphibians fired across the island into Norbert Circle to protect the flank of Company A as that unit probed Wendy Point. Instead of the concrete blockhouses they expected, these Marines found a single pillbox that had been blown to shreds by bombs and shellfire. Company B encountered no manned enemy positions between the beach and the 0-1 Line. At 1145, Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, began landing its medium tanks and flame-thrower-equipped light tanks. These

armored vehicles overtook the infantry on the runway and prepared to race across the remainder of the island.

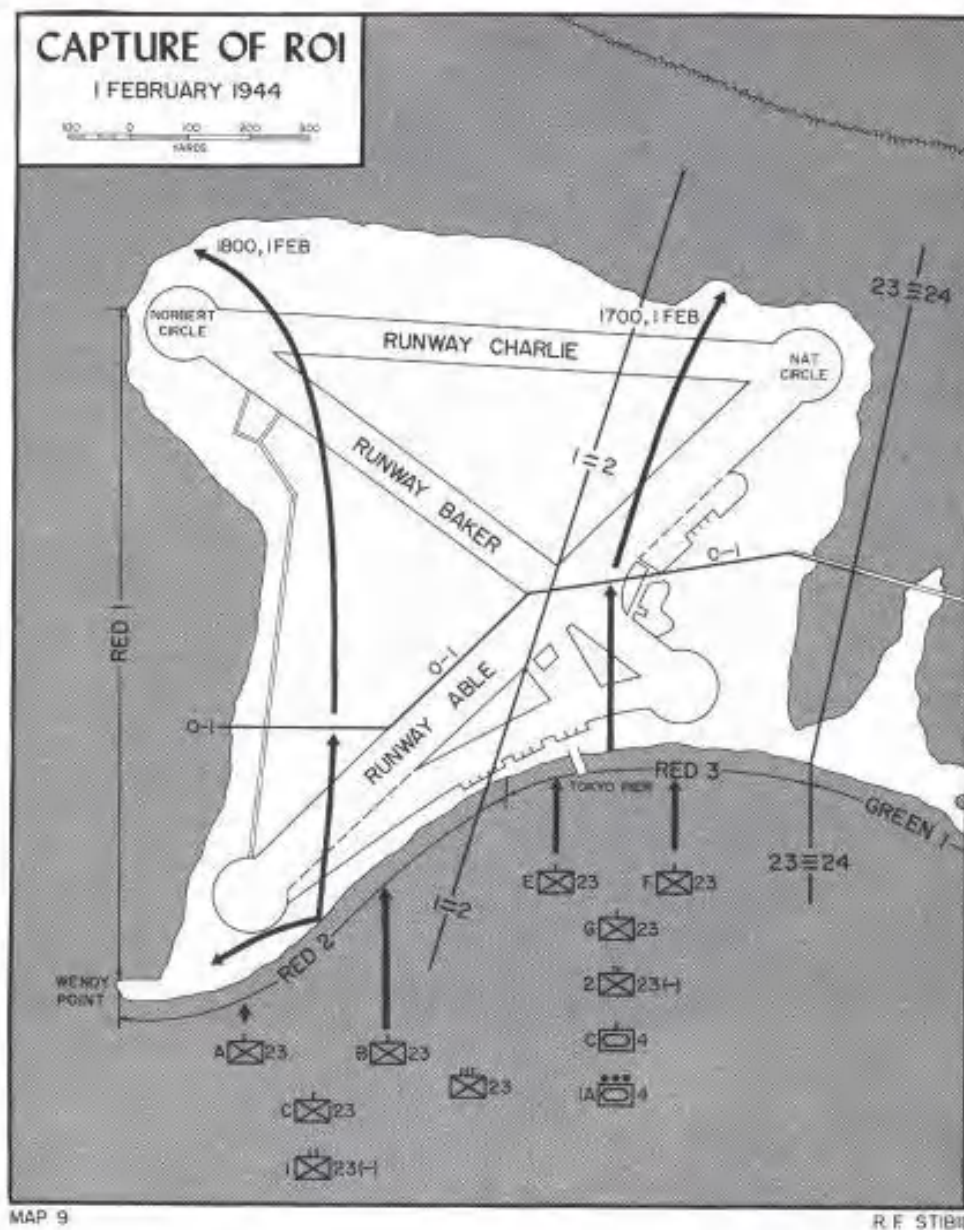
Upon crossing the line of departure, Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23 found its destination, Red 3, to be covered with a pall of dense smoke. The tractor drivers, unable to orient themselves, tended to drift from their assigned lanes. The LVT(A)s had the most difficult time. A total of 18 of these vehicles, in contrast to the 12 that led the way to Red 2, were crowded into a single wave. One participant recalled that "there was a good deal of 'accordion action,' with the result that several were squeezed out of line from time to time, and there were a number of collisions. . . ." ¹⁸ Worse yet, rockets launched by some of the LVT(2)s fell short and exploded in the water close to the armored amphibians.¹⁹ The LVT(A)s overcame these difficulties and took positions just off the island in order to support the advance of the infantry.

Red 3, objective of 2/23, embraced all of the lagoon coast that lay between the battalion boundary west of Tokyo Pier to the base of the sandspit that linked Roi to neighboring Namur. The sandspit itself lay in the zone of action of the 24th Marines. At approximately 1150, the assault waves began passing through the LVT(A)s and landing on the island. Some tractors rumbled ashore outside the proper zone, a few on either flank. The troops that landed out of place were shepherded

¹⁷ PhibAtkO (Main Ldgs), p. 4, dtd 8Jan44, Anx B to TF 53 OpO A157-44, dtd 8Jan44.

¹⁸ Maj Ellis N. Livingston ltr to CMC, dtd 8Nov52.

¹⁹ LtCol Louis Metzger ltr to CMC, dtd 13Nov52.



onto Red 3 by alert noncommissioned officers, but those who landed too far to the right had to destroy some Japanese positions before they could cross the regimental boundary.

Resistance on the eastern part of Red 3 was ineffectual. Most of the Japanese seemed dazed by the fierce bombardment which had shattered their prepared defenses. "We received very little enemy fire," recalled an officer who landed there with Company G, "and what fire we did receive came from the northeast corner of Roi."²⁰ To the west, a few defenders had survived both bombs and shells. "Although these enemy troops were few and dazed from the bombardment," stated an officer of Company E, "they were determined to give their all, as evidenced by the two who left their entrenchment to rush the landing troops."²¹

The surviving Japanese did not lack courage, but they were too few and too stunned to offer serious opposition to Dillon's Marines. Tanks started landing shortly after noon, and by 1215 the battalion commander had set up his command post on the island. Companies E and F had reached the 0-1 Line, which extended from the causeway leading toward Namur to the junction of runways Able and Baker, while Company G was busy ferreting out the Japanese who had taken cover in ruined buildings or in the culverts along the runways.

To an aerial observer circling over

²⁰ Maj John J. Padley ltr to Dir, DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 16Apr49.

²¹ Maj Carl O. Grussendorf ltr to Dir, DivPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 30Mar49.

Roi, the actions of the assault troops were startling. "Can observe along southwest tip of island;" came one report, "troops seen not to be taking advantage of cover."²² Colonel Jones, who landed at 1204, soon clarified the situation. "This is a pip," crackled General Schmidt's radio. "No opposition near the beach. . . ." ²³ Fifteen minutes later, the commanding officer of the 23d Marines had additional heartening news. "0-1 ours." he reported. "Give us the word and we will take the rest of the island."²⁴

In thrusting across the beach, the assault troops had gained such momentum that they approached the 0-1 Line like so many greyhounds in pursuit of a rabbit. Naval gunfire had drastically altered the landmarks which were to designate the line, and this contributed to a breakdown in control. The individual Marines, moreover, were inspired by their incredibly successful landing to finish off the Japanese as quickly as possible. With a confidence that bordered on recklessness, squads, platoons, and even companies launched an uncoordinated, and completely unauthorized, attack toward the northern shore.

If zest for combat can be considered a crime, the worst offenders were the tank and armored amphibian units. The crews of these vehicles, protected by armor plate, were indifferent to the .256 caliber rifle bullets that were cracking across the island. Upon

²² Air Observer 2 msg, dtd 1210, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*

²³ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1311, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*

²⁴ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1326, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl.*



MARINE LIGHT TANK *moves past the ruins of a beachhead CP on Namur to lead the attack.* (USMC 70203)



JAPANESE PRISONERS *surrender to Marines near a concrete blockhouse at Roi-Namur.* (USMC 70241)

reaching the 0-1 Line, the commander of Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, radioed for permission to continue the attack, but interference prevented his message from getting through. He then decided to advance rather than wait at the edge of the runway for further orders.

The company commander later justified his action by pointing out that: "If the enemy had had anti-tank guns in his blockhouses on the northern edge of the airfield, he would have been able to seriously damage any tanks remaining for long on the exposed runways."²⁵ Whatever the danger to the medium tanks might be, plans had called for the assault troops to pause at the 0-1 Line. As it turned out, the menacing blockhouses had been leveled by naval gunfire, and the company commander's aggressiveness prevented Colonel Jones from coordinating the efforts of his regiment.

The tanks roared northward firing cannon and machine guns at every ditch or heap of rubble that might harbor Japanese troops. The Marine infantrymen, trained to protect the tanks and as eager as anyone to advance, also crossed the line, firing frequently and sometimes wildly. A platoon of armored LVTs promptly joined the hunt. The amphibians moved northward along the western coast, some of them in the water, others on land, but all of them firing into trenches and other enemy positions.²⁶

²⁵ Co C, 4th TkBn AR, dtd 25Mar44, p. 1, Encl C to 4th TkBn Rpt of Activities in the FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 31Mar44, hereafter *4th TkBn Rpt*.

²⁶ Maj James S. Scales ltr to Dir, DivPub-Info, HQMC, dtd 16Mar49.

Although this impromptu attack killed numerous Japanese and sent most of the survivors scurrying toward the north, it imposed a hardship on the officers directing the campaign. As the tanks were approaching the northeastern corner of Roi, General Schmidt advised Colonel Jones to "await orders for further attack." "Can you," he continued, "control tanks and bring them back to 0-1 Line for coordinated attack?"²⁷ The tank company commander, in the meantime, was trying to raise Colonel Jones' command post to obtain additional infantry support. Again there was interference on the tank-infantry radio net, and the request was not received. After ranging over the island for about an hour, the Shermans pulled back to the 0-1 Line. Once the tanks began to withdraw, the infantry units followed their example, and by 1445 the colonel was reorganizing his command for a coordinated attack.

This drive was scheduled for 1515, with the two assault battalions advancing along the east and west coast. Once the shoreline had been captured, reserve units could mop up the stragglers who still lurked along the runways. At 1510, 2/23 called for a naval gunfire concentration to be fired against Nat Circle at the northeastern corner of the island. By 1530, the attack was underway.

Supported by the fire of half-tracks mounting 75mm guns, Dillon's Marines pushed resolutely toward Nat Circle. The enemy troops, with little time to

²⁷ Co C, 4th TkBn AR, dtd 25Mar44, p. 1, dtd 1325, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl*.

recover and reorganize after the earlier impromptu tank-infantry attack, were readily overcome. Tanks fought in cooperation with the infantry, and by 1600 organized resistance in the battalion zone was confined to the rubble-strewn tip of Roi. Behind 2/23 moved a company from 3/23, the battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Cosgrove, Jr. Because of the speed with which the assault units were moving, this company could not carry out its mission of supporting the advance by fire and had to content itself with mopping up.

Dillon's troops were approaching Nat Circle by the time Hammond's 1/23 launched its attack. From 1530 to 1600, the 1st Battalion supported by fire the thrust of its adjacent unit, then Hammond ordered his infantrymen and their supporting tanks and half-tracks to strike northward along the west coast. Within 45 minutes, all organized resistance in the zone of action had been crushed. During the advance by 1/23, two of Cosgrove's companies stood ready along the beach to thwart any Japanese attempt to attack across the sandspit from Namur.

By 1800, 1/23, in complete control along the western coast, was preparing defenses in the event of an enemy counterlanding. Tanks, riflemen, 37mm guns, a 75mm self-propelled gun, and demolitions teams combined their efforts to destroy the Japanese defending Nat Circle. At 1802, Colonel Jones was able to report that the coastline was secured and that his men were "mopping up, working toward center

from both sides."²⁸ Three minutes later, Roi was declared secured.

Once the situation on Roi was in hand, General Schmidt was able to concentrate on Namur, where the 24th Marines were facing determined resistance. The tanks supporting 3/23 were withdrawn even before the island was secured and sent across the sandspit. Although the defenders had been destroyed, quiet did not immediately descend upon Roi, for even as the last Japanese were being hunted down, an epidemic of "trigger-happiness" swept the island. Near Nat Circle, 3/23 extended between 3,000 and 5,000 rounds against a nonexistent sniper. Only a handful of these Marines actually knew why they were firing, but those who joined in had a sufficient motive. As members of the reserve battalion, they had played a minor role in a spectacularly successful assault, and, as their commanding officer discovered, "they wanted to be able to say they had fired at a Jap."²⁹ Three Marines were wounded as a result of this outburst.

On the west coast, men from 1/23 opened fire on a group of coral heads in the mistaken belief that these were Japanese troops swimming toward Roi. Observed through binoculars, the coral formations bore no resemblance to human beings, but, as one officer admitted, "to the unaided eye, those coral heads did look like swimmers."³⁰ No

²⁸ CO, 23d Mar msg to CG, 4th MarDiv, dtd 1802, 1Feb44, *4th MarDiv Jnl*.

²⁹ 3/23 Rpt of Firing in Vic of Southern Hangar on BURLESQUE, dtd 12Feb44, Encl D to 3/23 Rec of Events, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Scales ltr, *op. cit.*

one was injured as a result of this incident.

Colonel Jones had been absolutely correct when he called the Roi landings a "pip." Supporting weapons, especially naval gunfire, had done their work so well that the Japanese were incapable of putting up a coordinated defense. The level terrain enabled Marine tanks to roam the island at will. The fight for Roi had been an easy one. Such was not the case on neighboring Namur.

THE STORMING OF NAMUR ³¹

The signal to launch the assault on Namur came before the two assault battalions were fully organized. Both Brink's 2/24 and Brunelli's 3/24 had difficulty in getting enough tractors for their commands, and some last-minute arrivals were being fitted into the formation when the destroyer *Phelps* signaled the LVTs to start shoreward. The firepower of supporting weapons helped compensate for the lack of organization. The weapons massed by Lieutenant Colonel Chambers on the northern coast of ABRAHAM added their metal to that delivered by naval guns, artillery pieces, and aircraft. LCI gunboats and LVT(A)s led the assault troops toward the Green Beaches. (See Map 10.)

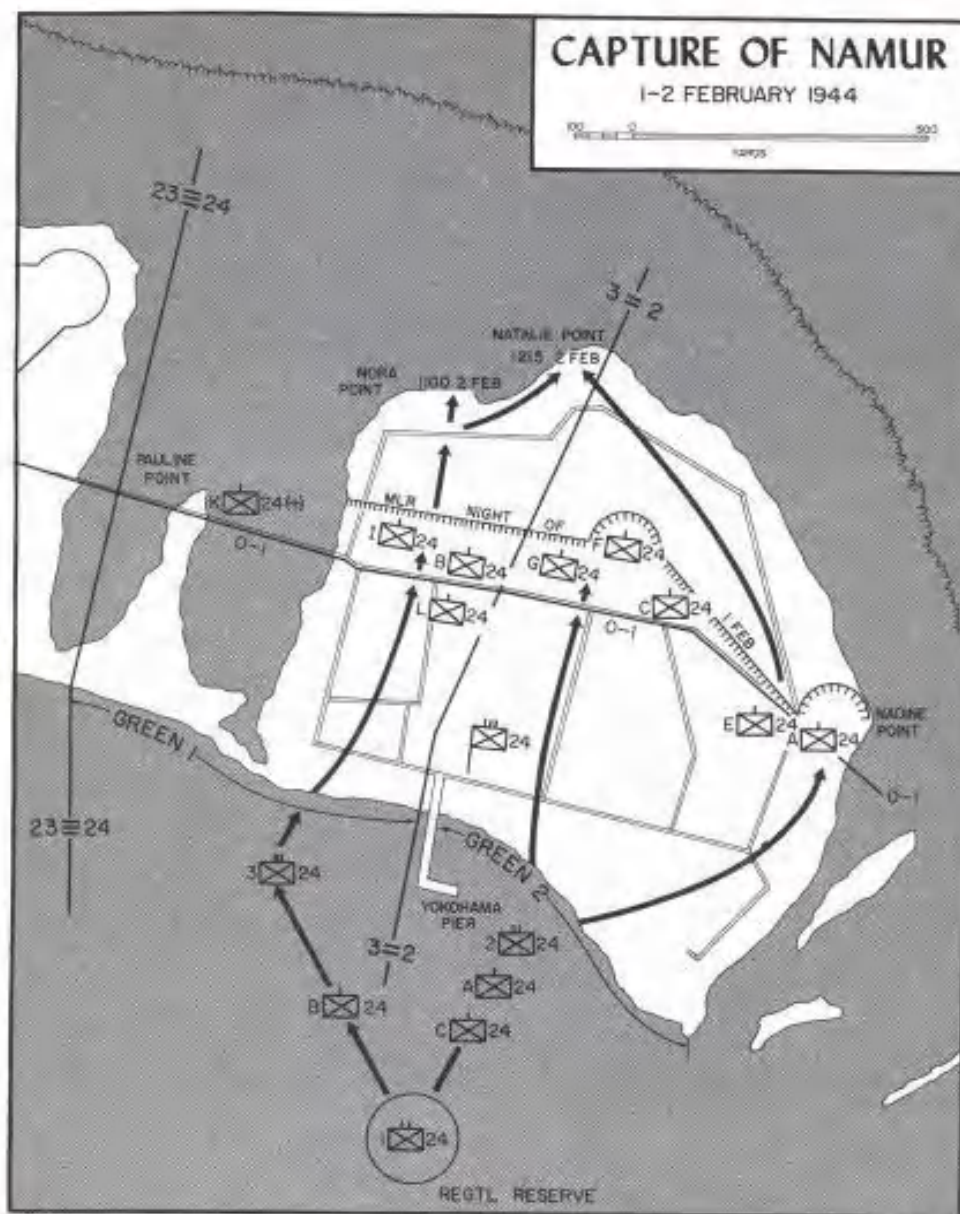
³¹ In addition to the sources already cited, two manuscripts, both of them monographs prepared for the Amphibious Warfare School, MCS, Quantico, Va., have been valuable. They are: LtCol Richard Rothwell, "A Study of an Amphibious Operation: The Battle of Namur, 31Jan-2Feb44," and LtCol Austin R. Brunelli, "Historical Tactical Study: The Capture of Namur Island, February 1-2, 1944."

Unlike the troops who were seizing Roi, the men of the 24th Marines got little benefit from the support of the armored amphibians. These vehicles stopped at the beaches and attempted to support by fire the advance inland. The actions of the LVT(A)s confounded Colonel Hart, the regimental commander, for he had planned that the armored amphibians would precede the assault waves to positions 100 yards inland of the Green Beaches. On the evening prior to the Namur landings, after he discovered that LVT(A)s had supported the landings on the outlying islands from positions offshore, the colonel sent a reminder to his attached armored amphibian unit. To guard any error, he told the unit commander: "You will precede assault waves to beach and land, repeat land, at W-Hour, repeat W-Hour, as ordered." ³² Explicit as these orders were, the LVT(A)s nonetheless could not carry them out. The antitank ditches backing the lagoon beaches and the cut-up jumble of trenches and debris proved to be an impassable barrier for the LVT(A)s in the short time that elapsed between the touchdown of the armored amphibians and the landing of the first waves of Marines.³³ As the infantry moved inland, the LVT(A)s furnished support with all guns blazing until their fire was masked by the advance of the assault troops.

The lagoon coast of Namur was divided into Beaches Green 1, the objective of 3/24, and Green 2, where 2/24 was to land. The boundary between

³² 2/24 CbtRpt, dtd 7Feb44, p. 2, in 24th Mar PrelimRpts, *op. cit.*

³³ Metzger *ltr.*



MAP 10

RE STIBIL

the two beaches was a line drawn just west of Yokohama pier. Green 2 encompassed the eastern two-thirds of the coast, while the remainder of the southern shore and the entire sandspit was designated Green 1. Brink's battalion was slated to land two companies abreast on Green 2, but the first unit ashore landed in the middle of the zone. Part of the other assault company scrambled from its LVTs directly behind the leading company. The rest of these riflemen began advancing inland in the left-hand sector on the battalion zone of action.

On the right, 2/24 landed one company, arranged in a single wave, at 1155. The two waves into which the other assault company had been organized began landing on Green 2 about five minutes later. Smoke and dust, which bedeviled the amphibian tractors bound for Roi, also caused the Namur assault elements to stray from their proper boat lanes.

The Marines of 2/24 had been instructed to leave their tractors, thrust immediately toward their first objective, the 0-1 Line and there reorganize. As the various rifle platoons landed, each sent ahead an assault team to deal with any fortifications that had survived the preliminary bombardment. The remainder of the platoon, divided into two groups, followed in the path of the assault element.³⁴ At the 0-1

Line, which ran along the road that extended from the causeway to within a few yards of the eastern shore, the platoons were to pause and reorganize. Here, too, company commanders would regroup their units for the drive across the island.

As was true on Roi, naval gunfire had so devastated Namur that many of the features designated to mark boundaries and phase lines were eradicated. Thick underbrush also made control difficult, for in places visibility was no more than a few feet. The 2/24 assault companies, nevertheless, continued to advance inland, but because they had landed out of position, a gap soon opened between their left flank and the battalion boundary. As landing craft became available, additional elements of the battalion reserve were landed, and Brink ordered these into the opening.

Within two hours after landing, the assault units, Companies E and F, were intermingled along the 0-1 Line. A contingent from Company G and a part of Company E had overcome a knot of resistance and advanced some 175 yards inland along the battalion left flank. The farther the reserve unit moved, however, the more intense grew the opposition. The effort on the left came to a halt, pinned down by fire from a thicket near the battalion boundary and north of the 0-1 Line. As soon as it became available, the remainder of Company G also was committed to aid in securing the open flank, but this group was stopped by a com-

³⁴ The assault companies of both 2/24 and of 3/24 were organized into boat teams of 18-20 men, each led by a lieutenant or senior NCO. In the 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Brink decided to fight his men as boat teams until they reached 0-1, about 300 yards from the

beach, where they would reorganize into platoons. *Brink ltr.*

mination of impenetrable undergrowth and Japanese fire.³⁵

The first wave of LVT(2)s carrying elements of Lieutenant Colonel Brunelli's 3/24 reached Green 1 at about 1155, and within five minutes, Companies I and K were beginning the advance toward 0-1. The final dash to the beach had been hampered by low-hanging clouds of smoke, and units had strayed from formation. In effect, the assault companies simply exchanged platoons, for, as one officer recalled, "the major part of one platoon from Company I landed in the K/24 zone and approximately the same number from K in the I/24 zone."³⁶ These units advanced directly inland, remaining with their "adopted" companies until the 0-1 Line was gained.

The volume of fire that greeted 3/24 was somewhat heavier than that which had been encountered by the battalion on its right. Small groups of Japanese, most of them still groggy from the bombardment, fought from the ruins of their emplacements, but there was no organized defense. The communications center on Namur, from which the defense of the twin islands was to have been directed, had been destroyed. Although the enemy would, as expected, fight to the death, he was no longer capable of launching a coordinated counterattack against the rapidly expanding beachhead.

Company B of Dyess' battalion, which had been assigned as Brunelli's reserve, shore party units, and self-pro-

pelled 75mm guns landed on Green 1, while the assault companies drove inland through the underbrush and debris. Riflemen and demolition teams worked together to destroy the scattered enemy pillboxes and covered emplacements and keep the attack moving. Many Japanese, hidden in the underbrush and shattered rubble, were bypassed by the assault units and left to reserve forces to mop up.

At 1300, three light tanks from Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, arrived on Green 1. Two of them bogged down in soft sand along the beach, and the other vehicle roared some 30 yards inland, tumbled into a shell crater, and threw a tread. Twice, groups of from 15 to 20 Japanese leaped from the shelter of pillboxes to attack the stranded tanks, but the Marines beat off both groups and cleared the structures where the enemy had hidden. Two Japanese were captured and 30 killed as a result of these forays. Later in the day, the remaining two lights of the supporting tank platoon landed and helped get the disabled vehicles back into the fight.

By 1400, 3/24 was reorganizing along the 0-1 Line. Company I had advanced about 150 yards beyond the control line, but Brunelli promptly ordered the unit to withdraw.

Although the enemy resisted the advance of 3/24 with greater vigor, the other battalion of Hart's regiment suffered a higher number of casualties, losses caused only indirectly by the defenders. At 1305, assault teams of 2/24 were attacking a massive concrete building in the vicinity of 0-1. As the Marines were placing shaped charges against the wall, the Japanese in the immediate vicinity took to their heels.

³⁵ Maj Charles T. Ireland, Jr. ltr to CMC, dtd 3Feb53, hereafter *Ireland ltr*.

³⁶ LtCol Albert Arsenault ltr to CMC, dtd 10Feb53.

Once the wall had been breached, the demolitions detail began hurling satchel charges inside. Suddenly, the structure vanished in a pillar of smoke.

At this moment the regimental command post group, in the process of moving ashore, was approximately 300 yards off Namur. While Lieutenant Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr., the executive officer, watched, "the whole of Namur Island disappeared from sight in a tremendous brown cloud of dust and sand raised by the explosion."³⁷ Two other blasts occurred in rapid succession, and within seconds large chunks of concrete and other debris began raining down on Colonel Hart's command post, causing some injuries.³⁸

The devastation ashore was awesome. An officer who was standing on the beach at the time of the first explosion recalled that "trunks of palm trees and chunks of concrete as large as packing crates were flying through the air like match sticks. . . . The hole left where the blockhouse stood was as large as a fair sized swimming pool."³⁹ This series of blasts killed 20 members of 2/24 and wounded 100 others. Among the injured was Lieutenant Colonel Brink, who refused to be evacuated.

At first, the tragedy was believed to have been caused by a fluke hit by a 16-inch shell on a warehouse filled with explosives. Investigation proved that the satchel charges thrown into the bunker had detonated row upon row of torpedo warheads. This violent blast could

have touched off two smaller magazines nearby, or the enemy may possibly have caused the later explosions in the hope of inflicting additional casualties.⁴⁰

The three explosions, which caused about one-half of its casualties on Namur, were a severe blow to 2/24. Colonel Hart attached Company A of Dyess' command to the battered unit, and a delay ensued as Brink's organization was restored to effectiveness. In the meantime, 3/24 was poised to attack toward the northern coast.

From the undergrowth across the 0-1 Line, a trio of Japanese emplacements were holding Brunelli's Marines at bay. The commanding officer of 3/24 planned to attack at 1630 in conjunction with Brink's unit. In preparation for this effort, light tanks and armored amphibians rumbled inland to fire into the enemy strongpoints. Two of these positions were silenced, but the third, a pillbox near the eastern shore, continued to enfilade the ground along the 0-1 Line.

Company L finally landed at 1531, an unavoidable delay since, as its commander pointed out, the unit "had no means of getting ashore earlier other than swimming."⁴¹ This company relieved Company B as 3d Battalion reserve, assumed responsibility for mopping up, and sent men to strengthen Company I. Company B then moved

³⁷ BGen Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 31Jan53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ 1stLt Samuel H. Zutty ltr to CMC, dtd 28Jan53.

⁴⁰ Capt Joseph E. LoPrete, "The Battle of Roi-Namur," monograph prepared for the Amphibious Warfare School, MCS, Quantico, Va. A platoon leader on Namur, Captain LoPrete commanded one of the two assault teams that attacked the explosives-laden bunker.

⁴¹ LtCol Houston Stiff ltr to CMC, dtd 26Jan53.

into line in place of Company K, which was sent to the sandspit. Company K was to consolidate control over Pauline Point, which extended beyond the front lines, and support by fire the advance on Namur proper.

At 1630, as the advance division command post was being established on Namur, 3/24 launched its drive. Because of the tragic blast, 2/24 was not yet ready to advance. Brunelli's Marines found that the Japanese had recovered from the effects of the bombardment. Although resistance was not coordinated, dense thickets and the enemy's willingness to die fighting combined to slow the offensive.

While 3/24 was attacking, Lieutenant Colonel Brink was busy shuffling his units in an effort to restore 2/24 to fighting trim. Company A moved to the right-hand portion of the battalion zone. To its left was another attached organization, Company C, along with fragments of Companies E and F and approximately half of Company G.⁴² Light tanks of the Headquarters Section and 1st Platoon, Company B, 4th Tank Battalion added their weight and firepower, and at 1730 2/24 joined 3/24 in plunging northward.

Tanks, protected insofar as the foliage permitted by infantrymen, spearheaded both battalions. These

vehicles fired 37mm canister rounds which shredded the stubborn undergrowth in addition to killing Japanese. Whenever the riflemen encountered an especially difficult thicket, they temporarily lost sight of the tanks they were to protect, and the vehicles to the rear had to defend those in front of them. If enemy soldiers attempted to clamber aboard the leading tanks in an attempt to disable them with grenades, 37mm guns in the covering wave would unleash a hail of canister that swept the enemy to oblivion.

Without this sort of protection, a light tank was all but helpless, as proved by an incident in the 3/24 zone. One vehicle from Company B struck a log, veered out of position, and stopped to orient itself. A squad of Japanese swarmed onto the tank, and a grenade tumbled through a signal port which had been left open to allow engine fumes to escape. The blast killed two of the four Marines inside and wounded the others. Another tank and its accompanying rifle squad arrived in time to cut down the fleeing enemy.

Elements of 2/24 managed to make deep penetrations during the afternoon action. On the left, a few riflemen and some tanks reached a position within 35 yards of the north coast. This position, however, could not be maintained, and the men and machines were ordered to rejoin the rest of the battalion about 100 yards to the south. On the right, the elements of 2/24 that were probing Nadine Point encountered vicious machine gun fire. Although these Marines were able to beat off a local counterattack, they could not advance far beyond 0-1.

⁴² The remainder of Company G was having troubles of its own. "No orders for a concerted attack during the afternoon ever reached me," recalled the executive officer. "The situation for my portion of G during the rest of the daylight hours was one of no contact with 2/24, no visible elements of 3/24 on my left, visual contact with a unit of 1/24 on my right, and heavy fire from the front." *Ireland ltr.*

Near 1700, General Schmidt landed and conferred with Colonel Hart. Within an hour, the general had opened his command post on Namur and was shifting his troops to assist the 24th Marines. He ordered Jones' reserve battalion (3/23) and the medium tanks of the combat team to move at once to Namur.⁴³ The Shermans lumbered across the sandspit in time to take part in the afternoon's fighting.

A platoon of these tanks reported to Lieutenant Colonel Brunelli at 1830, when 3/24 had advanced some 175 yards beyond the 0-1 Line. Rather than waste time feeding the Shermans into the battalion skirmish line, Brunelli used them to spearhead a sweep along the west coast. The tanks, a 75mm self-propelled gun, and several squads of infantry brushed aside enemy resistance to secure the abandoned emplacements on Natalie Point, northernmost part of the island. Isolated and low on ammunition, the task force had to withdraw before darkness.

At 1930, Colonel Hart ordered his Marines to halt and defend the ground they already had gained. Except for two bulges, the regimental main line of resistance ran diagonally from a point roughly 100 yards south of Nora Point to the intersection of 0-1 and the eastern coast. Toward the left of Brink's sector, the line curved to include the group of light tanks and riflemen that had been ordered back from near the north shore.⁴⁴ On the far right, the line again veered northward to encompass the elements of 2/24 that had

overrun a part of Nadine Point. As Brink's Marines were digging in, the missing portion of Company G rejoined its parent unit along the battalion boundary.⁴⁵

NAMUR SECURED

The night of 1-2 February was somewhat confusing but not particularly dangerous to the embattled Marines. From the front, the Japanese attempted to harass the assault troops, while to the rear by-passed defenders would pop out of piles of debris, fire their weapons, and quickly disappear. In addition, Colonel Hart's men had to put up with the "eerie noise of the star shell as it flew through the air," a sound which they at first found disturbing.⁴⁶ Since this was their first night of combat, the Marines did engage in some needless shooting at imagined snipers. When some machine gunners along the beach opened fire into the treetops to their front, General Schmidt himself emerged from his command post to calm them.⁴⁷ The troops, however, conducted themselves well enough, and the enemy, although able to launch local attacks, was incapable of making a serious effort to hurl the invaders into the sea.

Darkness found the medium tanks that had crossed over from Roi in difficult straits. The armored unit was located inland from Green 1, but its gasoline and ammunition were on Red 3. Boats could not be found to ferry the needed supplies from Roi, and the tank

⁴³ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 22Oct62.

⁴⁴ LtCol Frank E. Garretson interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Jan53.

⁴⁵ Ireland ltr.

⁴⁶ Zutty ltr, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 10Nov52.

crews did not have pumps with which to transfer gasoline from one vehicle to another. They had no choice but to pool all the remaining 75mm shells and divide them among the four Shermans that had the most fuel.

The coming of light proved the wisdom of this arrangement, for the tanks were able to assist Companies I and B in shattering a counterattack. During the night, contact between the two units had been lost, and the enemy was now trying to exploit the gap. While the tanks charged forward, Company L moved into position to contain any breakthrough, and Company K began withdrawing from the sandspit to the island proper.

The Japanese counterattack failed, though the fighting raged for 25 minutes. When Company L arrived to seal the gap, it found that the medium tanks and the men of Companies I and B had broken the enemy spearhead and advanced about 50 yards. All that remained was the task of pushing to the north shore.

Colonel Hart planned to attack at 0900 with two battalions abreast. Enough medium tanks were now available to provide assistance to the riflemen of both battalions. Lieutenant Colonel Brink, injured on the previous day when the blockhouse exploded, yielded command of 2/24 to Lieutenant Colonel Dyess of 1/24. Two rifle companies from 1/24 were to take part in the morning attack of the 2d Battalion, while the third served as reserve for 3/24. Mopping-up was to be carried out concurrent with the advance.

Brunelli's Marines, aided by medium tanks, launched their blow exactly on

schedule. The Shermans concentrated on pillboxes and other concrete structures, firing armor-piercing rounds to penetrate the walls and then pumping high explosives shells into the interior. Nora Point was taken within two hours, and by 1215, 3/24 was in control of Natalie Point on the northern coast.

The medium tanks destined for 2/24 were late in arriving, so the attack by the battalion was delayed until 1006. On the left, a blockhouse had to be destroyed by tanks and self-propelled guns, but elsewhere the Marines moved steadily northward. The final enemy strongpoint proved to be an antitank ditch, part of the defenses along the ocean shore, from which the Japanese were firing at the advancing troops. Light tanks wiped out these defenders by moving to the flank of the ditch and raking it with canister and machine gun fire. Lieutenant Colonel Dyess, who had repeatedly risked his life throughout the morning to keep the attack moving, was killed as he urged his men toward Natalie Point. At 1215, the two battalions met at Natalie Point; Namur had been overrun. The island was declared secured at 1418.

Because of the more determined resistance on Namur, Navy corpsmen assigned to the 24th Marines had a more difficult job than those who served with the 23d Marines on Roi. A corpsman accompanied every assault platoon, "and wherever and whenever a man was hit, he went unhesitatingly to his assistance, often . . . coming directly into an enemy line of fire."⁴⁸ Shell craters became aid stations, as

⁴⁸ 1stLt John C. Chapin memo to Capt William G. Wendell, dtd 8Jan45.

corpsmen struggled to save the lives of wounded Marines. Once again, these sailors had performed their vital work skillfully and courageously.

Colonel Hart's 24th Marines had conquered Namur in spite of serious obstacles. The most spectacular of these was the tragic explosion of the blockhouse, but the shortage of tractors, the incompletely formed assault waves, poor communications, and tangled undergrowth also conspired against the regiment. Colonel Hart remained convinced that "had LVT(2)s and/or LCVPs been available as originally planned, or had the departure . . . been delayed until 1200," the island would have been taken more quickly and with fewer casualties.⁴⁹

The men of both regiments were brave and aggressive, if somewhat lacking in fire discipline. Their primary mission accomplished, the men of the 4th Marine Division could allow their guns to cool, absorb the lessons of the past few days, and prepare for the final phase of the FLINTLOCK operation. To the south, however, the fight for Kwajalein Island still was raging. As the Marines rested, soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division continued to press an attack of their own.

*THE CONQUEST OF KWAJALEIN ISLAND*⁵⁰

At 0930, 1 February, the 32d and 184th Infantry Regiments of General Corlett's 7th Infantry Division landed at

the western end of Kwajalein Island. The preliminary bombardment by field artillery and naval guns, as well as the aerial strikes, had been extremely effective. Admiral Turner, at the request of General Corlett, had ordered two of his battleships to close to 2,000 yards, an extremely short range for these big ships, and level a wall inland of the assault beaches. The captains involved did not believe the figure was correct and asked for clarification, so Turner subtracted 500 yards from his original order, and had them open fire.⁵¹ (See Map 11.)

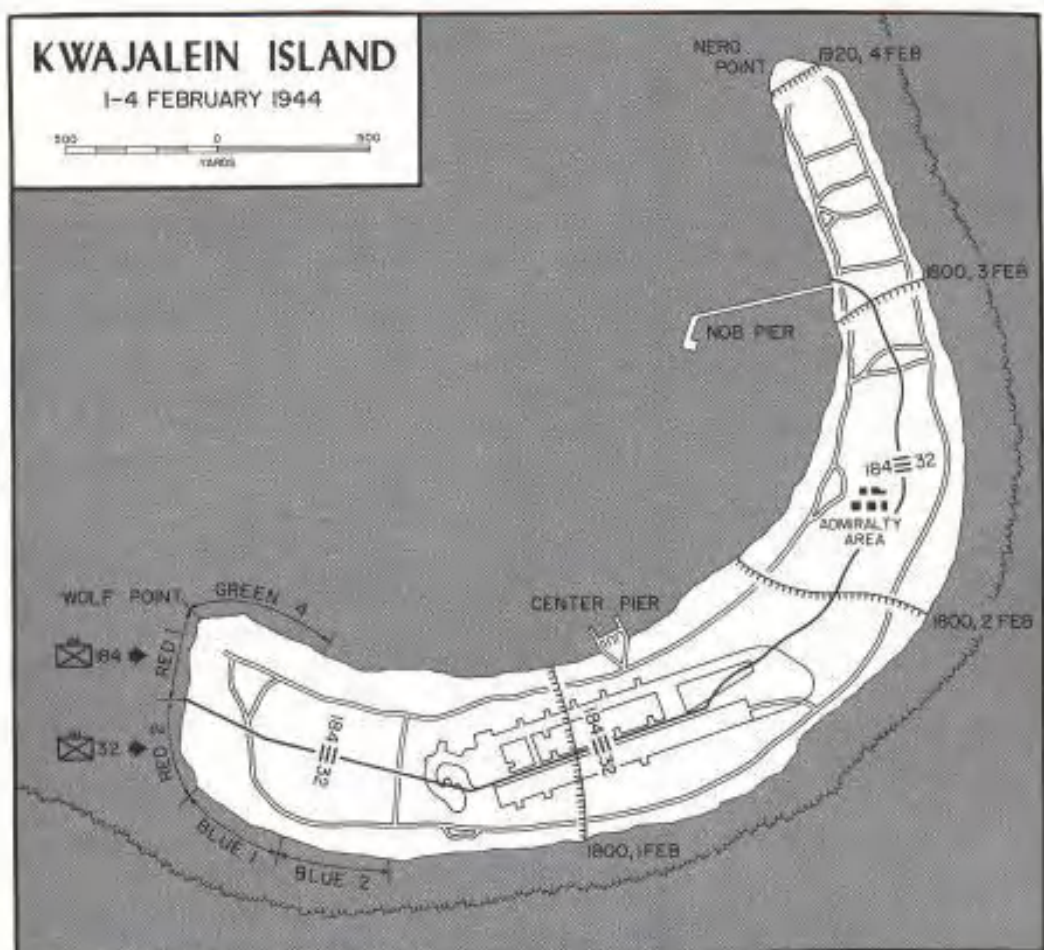
Aided by this kind of fire support, the well-rehearsed assault proceeded relatively smoothly. The formation headed for each of the two landing beaches was shaped somewhat like the letter U. On either flank, extending forward at an angle of about 45 degrees from the base, was a line of LVT(A)s. These vehicles joined the LCI gunboats in neutralizing the beaches and then crawled ashore to protect the flanks of the beachhead. At the base of the U were the troop-carrying LVTs, with both rifle and engineer platoons in the first wave.

The landings were executed as planned. The only difficulty, telescoping toward the right of the assault waves, stemmed from a mechanical characteristic of the tractors used at Kwajalein Island. These vehicles tended to pull toward the left. The drivers attempted to compensate by inclining toward the right, and in their

⁴⁹ 24th MarRpt of FLINTLOCK Op, p. 8, dtd 10Mar44, Encl E to 4th MarDiv AR, p. 8.

⁵⁰ The official Army account of this action is contained in Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*, pp. 230-282.

⁵¹ MajGen Charles H. Corlett, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 14Jan53. The closest range reported by the bombardment battleships on the morning of 1 February is 1,800 yards. Dir NHD cmts on draft MS, dtd 27Nov62.



MAP II

R.F. STIBIL

eagerness to remain in the proper lanes they veered too far.⁵²

On the first day, the infantry-engineer teams quickly secured the beaches. No serious opposition was encountered until the attackers had overrun the western third of the airfield. At this point, however, the nature of the battle changed. By the end of the first day, the swift amphibious thrust had become a systematic and thorough offensive designed to destroy a Japanese garrison that was fighting from ruined buildings, shattered pillboxes, and piles of debris. Massive artillery concentrations and close coordination between tanks and riflemen characterized the advance which ended at 1920 on 4 February with the securing of the farthest tip of the island.

As far as Marines were concerned, the most interesting feature of this operation was the logistical plan devised by General Corlett and his staff. Instead of LVTs, the 7th Infantry Division used DUKWs as supply vehicles. Amphibious trucks, filled with items certain to be needed early in the operation, were loaded in LSTs before the convoy left the Hawaiian Islands. These vehicles were sent ashore as needed. As soon as they had unloaded, they reported to the beachmaster. That officer placed the wounded in some of the trucks, but whether or not they carried casualties, all DUKWs next reported to a control officer off the beach. Here a representative of the division medical officer directed the wounded to

vessels equipped to care for them, while the control officer saw to it that the DUKWs maintained an uninterrupted flow of supplies from the LSTs to the assault units.

In general, the so-called "hot cargo" system worked well, for by noon of D-Day DUKWs were already arriving on the island. The only serious breakdown, which occurred that night, was caused by a flaw in the basic plan. As evening approached, two of three LSTs that were feeding cargo to trucks destined for the 184th Infantry were recalled from their unloading area. The remaining ship carried no 75mm ammunition for the tanks assigned to support the next day's advance. As a result, the Shermans were late in getting into action.⁵³

The logistical plan, however, cannot account for the comparative ease with which the assault waves gained Kwajalein's beaches. The tractor and LVT(A) units assigned to the 7th Infantry Division benefited from rehearsals held in Hawaii prior to departure for the target area. By the time these exercises were held, the plan of attack had been completed. Not so fortunate were the tractor units that landed the 4th Marine Division, for their final rehearsal was held even before the landing force scheme of maneuver had been decided upon. The lack of a last-minute rehearsal gravely hampered the Marines.

The D-Day operations also had a more serious effect on the Marine LVT

⁵² LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "Notes Prepared in the Central and Middle Pacific: The Assault on PORCELAIN" (Hist MS File, OCMH), pp. 1-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 95; LtCol S. L. A. Marshall, USA, "General and Miscellaneous Materials on Central Pacific: Supply" (Hist MS File, OCMH), pp. 44-45.



ARMY 37MM ANTITANK GUN fires at enemy pillbox on Kwajalein during 7th Infantry Division advance. (USA SC18555)



MARINE 105MM HOWITZERS, transported by DUKWs, set up on an off-lying island to cover the landings on Engebi, Eniwetok Atoll. (USN 80-G-233228)

units than on the Army tractor battalion. On 31 January, General Corlett had employed tractor groups against two islands and held back two other groups, one per assault battalion, for the following day's operation. More complicated was the task facing General Schmidt, whose troops had to seize five small islands. Although he did maintain a reserve for Roi-Namur, these idle tractors had to be augmented by vehicles that took part in the D-Day landings. This was necessary since four battalions were to storm the twin islands. Because of the series of delays and other misfortunes, not enough tractors could be retrieved before nightfall. Thus, the number of landings scheduled for D-Day, the width of the beachheads the 4th Marine Division was to seize, and the lack of rehearsals combined to complicate the Roi-Namur landings.

General Corlett could well be satisfied with the conduct of his veteran division at Kwajalein Island. "I think the Navy did a marvelous job as did the Marines," he later observed, "and I think the Army did as well as either of them."⁵⁴ With the capture of Kwajalein Island on 4 February, the last of FLINTLOCK's principal objectives was secured, but several lesser islands remained to be taken.

*THE FINAL PHASE*⁵⁵

On Roi-Namur the work of burying the enemy dead, repairing battle dam-

age, and emplacing defensive weapons was begun as promptly as possible. Antiaircraft guns of the 15th Defense Battalion were being landed even as the fighting raged. Once the battle had ended, the 20th Marines began clearing Roi airstrip, but on D plus 5, these engineers were relieved of the task by a naval construction battalion. During this same period, various elements of the 4th Marine Division got ready to depart from Kwajalein Atoll.

Badly pummelled by American carrier planes, Japanese air power had been unable to contest the Roi-Namur operation, but early in the morning of 12 February, 12-14 enemy seaplanes struck at Roi. The raiders dropped strips of metal foil to confuse American radar and managed to catch the defenders by surprise. From the Japanese point of view, the attack was a complete success. An ammunition dump, 85 percent of the supplies stockpiled on the island, and roughly one-third of the heavy construction equipment were destroyed. Thirty Americans were killed and an estimated 400 wounded.

The raid on Roi, however, had no effect on the final phase of the 4th Marine Division overall plan. By the time of the aerial attack, Company A, 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and the 25th Marines had investigated the remaining islands in the northern part of Kwajalein Atoll. On 2 February, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 seized eight islands. No resistance was met,

⁵⁴ Corlett ltr, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Additional sources for this section include: 20th Mar Rpt on FLINTLOCK Op, dtd 16Mar44, pp. 2-4; Col Peter J. Negri ltr to

CMC, dtd 5Feb53; Carl W. Proehl, ed., *The Fourth Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1946), p. 34, hereafter Proehl, *4th MarDiv History*.

and after the first two landings, the planned artillery preparations were cancelled. Lieutenant Colonel O'Donnell led 1/25 against three islands, and Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3/25 secured 39 others within four days. Once the final landings were completed, the regiment served for a time as part of the atoll garrison force. (See Map 8.)

While Colonel Cumming's regiment was occupying the lesser islands in the north, the 17th Infantry and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop were performing a similar mission in the southern part of Kwajalein Atoll. Unlike the Marines, the soldiers encountered vicious fighting on some of the objectives. At CHAUNCEY, where the unit had landed by mistake on D-Day, the reconnaissance troop killed 135 Japanese. BURTON required the services of two battalions of the 17th Infantry, but within two days, 450 of the defenders were dead and the 7 survivors taken prisoner. In spite of the frequent opposition, the last of the southern islands was captured on 5 February.

Both assault divisions could look

back on a job well done. According to intelligence estimates, the Northern Landing Force had defeated enemy garrisons numbering 3,563, while the Southern Landing Force accounted for 4,823 Japanese and Koreans. Thus, each division had overwhelmed in a series of landings a total force approximately the same size as the Betio garrison. Yet, American losses in FLINTLOCK were far fewer than the casualties suffered at Betio. The 4th Marine Division had 313 killed and 502 wounded, while the 7th Infantry Division lost 173 killed and 793 wounded.⁵⁶

While the combat troops might pause to congratulate themselves, Admiral Nimitz and his staff continued to look to the future. Planners had to determine how best to capitalize on the stunning victory at Kwajalein Atoll. Should the blow at Eniwetok Atoll, tentatively scheduled for May 1944, be launched immediately?

⁵⁶ A breakdown by unit of casualty figures for the 4th Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division is contained in Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*, pp. 169-171. Final official Marine Corps casualty totals for the Kwajalein Operation are listed in Appendix H.

Westward to Eniwetok¹

“Will the enemy attack Eniwetok?” asked Norio Miyada, one of the defenders of the atoll. To him the answer was obvious. “He will strike this island after attacking Roi.” The only problem lay in deciding when the Americans would enter the lagoon. This noncommissioned officer, confident of Japanese aerial superiority in the Marshalls, expected a slow advance. “How will the enemy be able to attack us?” he continued. “Will it be by his hackneyed method of island hopping?”²

REVISING THE TIMETABLE

Actually, Admiral Nimitz looked forward to leapfrogging the central part of the Marshalls group. He planned to vault from Kwajalein to Eniwetok, neutralizing the Japanese bastions in between. Even before FLINTLOCK was launched, troops were preparing

for CATCHPOLE, as the Eniwetok operation was called.

On 1 January 1944, the 2d Marine Division began intensive training for the assault upon Eniwetok Atoll. Within two weeks, the 27th Infantry Division was alerted to ready itself for an attack on Kusaie Island in the eastern Carolines, the second objective in the current CATCHPOLE plan. The target date for Eniwetok had been fixed at 1 May to enable units of the Fifth Fleet to assist in the seizure of Kavieng, New Ireland, an operation that eventually was cancelled.³

Admiral Spruance, however, felt that his warships should strike at Eniwetok before steaming southward to Kavieng. This opinion was shared by Admiral Turner, whose staff prepared a tentative plan to advance promptly to Eniwetok if the FLINTLOCK operation was executed smoothly. General Holland Smith's VAC planners also looked ahead to the rapid capture of Eniwetok, but theirs, too, was a tentative concept.⁴

Execution of the Eniwetok proposals depended upon the intelligence that

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: CinCPac CATCHPOLE Plan, dtd 29Nov43; TF 51 OPlan A9-44, dtd 7Feb44; TG 51.11 OpO A105-44, dtd 13Feb44; TG 51.11 AtkO A106-44, dtd 9Feb44; TG 51.11 Rpt of Eniwetok Opns, dtd 7Mar44, hereafter *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; VAC MiscOs and Rpts File, Eniwetok; TG 1 OpO 2-44, dtd 10Feb44; TG 1 AdminO 2-44, dtd 10Feb44; TG 1 SAR CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 10Mar44, hereafter *TG 1 SAR*; CominCh, *Marshall Islands*; Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*.

² JICPOA Item No. 8200, Extracts from the Diary of Norio Miyada.

³ VAC WarD, Jan44, p. 11. For the story of the Kavieng venture and of the intended part of Marine units in its capture see Shaw and Kane, *Isolation of Rabaul*, p. 501ff.

⁴ VAC G-3 Rpt on FLINTLOCK, dtd 12Feb44, Encl B to VAC AR, FLINTLOCK; TF 51 AR, p. 6; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 291-292.

could be obtained concerning the objective and on the cost in lives and time of the Kwajalein campaign. During an aerial reconnaissance on 28 December 1943, the first successful penetration of Eniwetok during the war, cameras were trained only on Engebi Island, site of an airstrip. Within a month, however, the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, had amassed enough data to issue a bulletin describing the atoll and its defenses. Last-minute details were provided by the carrier planes which photographed the atoll on 30 January. FLINTLOCK itself brought a windfall of captured documents, among them navigational charts of Eniwetok Atoll. The various parts of the puzzle were assembled, and the task of fitting them together was begun. (See Map 12.)

The fighting within Kwajalein Atoll also was progressing rapidly at a reasonable cost to the attackers. On 2 February, Admiral Turner recommended to Admiral Spruance that the CATCHPOLE operation begin immediately. Turner offered a plan to strike with the 22d Marines and two battalions of the 106th Infantry as soon after 10 February as the necessary ships had taken on fuel and ammunition and the carrier air groups had been brought up to full strength.

Admiral Nimitz, who had received copies of Turner's dispatches, now asked Spruance's views on an amphibious assault upon Eniwetok to be preceded immediately by a carrier strike against Truk. The Fifth Fleet commander favored such a course of action,⁵ and on 5 February, Admiral

Nimitz arrived at Kwajalein to discuss the proposed operation with his principal subordinates. The Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, approved the concept set forth by Admiral Turner. Originally, 15 February was selected as the target date, but D-Day had to be postponed until 17 February to give the fast carriers more time to prepare for their concurrent attack on Truk.⁶

TASK ORGANIZATION

Admiral Hill, commander of the Majuro attack force, reported to Admiral Turner at Kwajalein on 3 February. "I had no forewarning of the possibilities of my being put in command of the Eniwetok operation," Hill recalled, but warning or none, he was given overall command of Task Group 51.11, the Eniwetok Expeditionary Group.⁷ In organizing his force, he followed the pattern he had used for the Majuro landing.

With only seven days for planning, and again only a small segment of a larger hydrographic chart to work

miral Spruance related: "I at once went over to see Admiral Kelly Turner and General Holland Smith about it. They were both favorable. When I asked about the time needed to prepare the plans, Holland Smith said he had already prepared a plan while they were coming out from Pearl. This set the operation up, and we covered it with a strike on Truk on 16 and 17 February by Task Force 58." *Spruance 62 ltr.*

⁶ Adm Richmond K. Turner ltr to CMC, dtd 13Apr53, hereafter *Turner ltr II*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, pp. 291-292.

⁷ VAdm Harry W. Hill ltr to CMC, dtd 24Feb53.

⁵ On receiving Admiral Nimitz' request, Ad-

from, Admiral Hill's "first request was for high and low angle photographs taken at high and low tide and particularly in the early morning with its usually still waters."⁸ Using the facilities of Admiral Turner's AGC, a photo-based map was reproduced in quantity for the use of the task group. Right after this map was run off, Admiral Hill was presented with a captured Japanese chart taken from a ship wrecked on the shore of one of the islands of Kwajalein. The enemy map, which was used during the operation, showed the area clear of mines and the preferred channel into the lagoon at Eniwetok.⁹

The Eniwetok Expeditionary Group consisted of: Headquarters, Support Aircraft (Captain Richard F. Whitehead, USN); Expeditionary Troops, commanded by Marine Brigadier General Thomas E. Watson; Carrier Task Group 4, under Rear Admiral Samuel P. Ginder; plus the Eniwetok Attack Force and the Eniwetok Garrison Group, these last two commanded by Admiral Hill. The flagship was the USS *Cambria*, which had served Hill during the conquest of Majuro, but the total number of ships assigned to him was far greater than he had commanded during FLINTLOCK.

The assault troops required eight transports of various types, two attack cargo ships, one cargo ship, an LSD, nine LSTs, and six LCIs. Ten destroyers were assigned to screen the

transports and cargo vessels, while three battleships, three heavy cruisers, and another seven destroyers formed the fire support group. An escort carrier group, three carriers and three destroyers, joined a fast carrier group, three larger carriers and their screen, in providing aerial support for the operation.

General Watson was to have operational control over expeditionary troops once the landing force was established ashore. Since General Smith would not be present at Eniwetok, Admiral Turner charged the Commander, Expeditionary Troops, with duties similar to those carried out by the corps commander at Kwajalein Atoll. "General Watson," Turner has explained, "was in over-all command of all [troop units], but did not exercise detailed tactical command on shore of any one of them."¹⁰ Like Smith during FLINTLOCK, Watson could issue no orders "as to major landings or as to major changes in tactical plans" without the naval commander's approval.¹¹

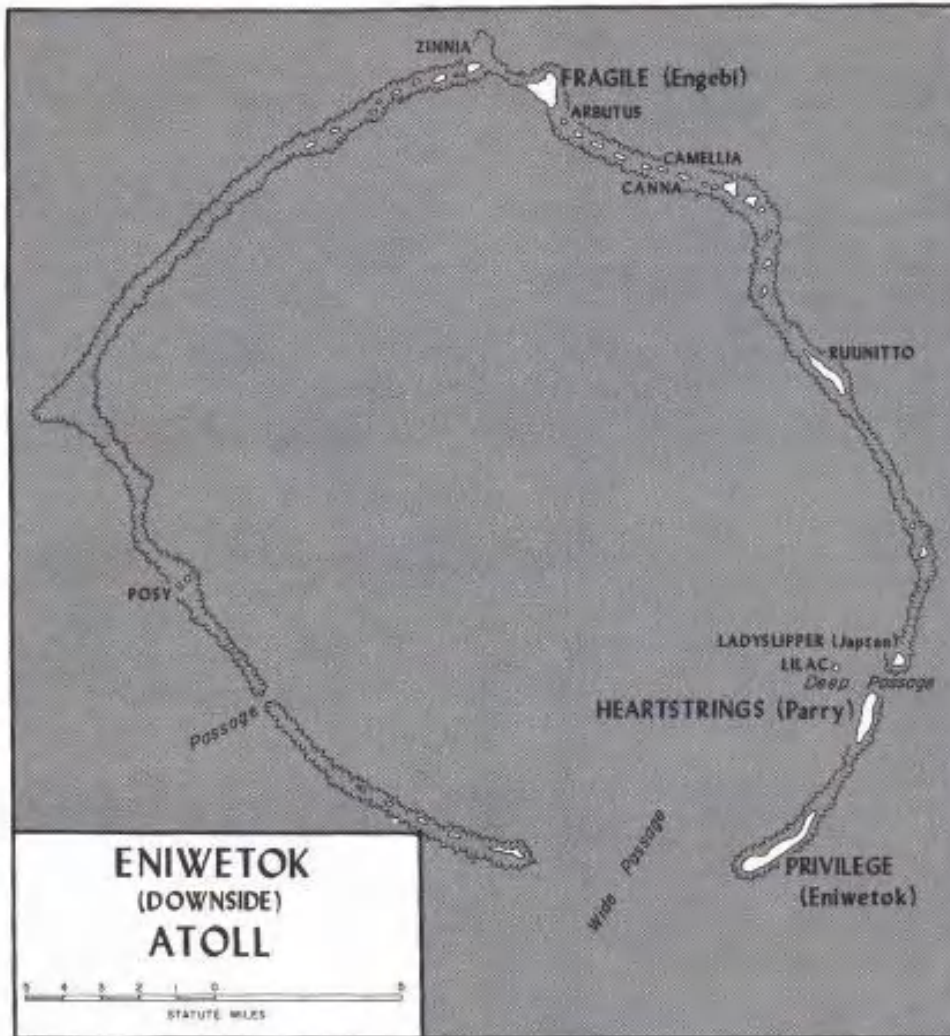
Because Turner's Eniwetok operation plan did not require Watson to report to the attack force commander when he was ready to assume command ashore, a Marine officer on Admiral King's staff interpreted the command arrangement as a modification of the structure used during FLINTLOCK. "Previous orders," he noted, "did not give this command to the ground force commander until he stated he was ready to assume it. In other words, it formerly required positive action on the ground force com-

⁸ *Hill interview/comments Marshalls.*

⁹ *Ibid.* Admiral Hill noted that when the fleet anchorage was established at Eniwetok, it was in the area picked by his staff from the original chart based on aerial photographs.

¹⁰ *Turner ltr II.*

¹¹ *TF 51 OPlan A6-43*, p. 9.



MAP 12

R.F. STIBIL

mander's part. Now it is established before the operation began."¹²

In fact, no change had actually been made, for Watson was, according to Turner, the commander of a small-scale corps. The Marine general in command of the Eniwetok forces was holding a position comparable to that held by Smith at Kwajalein. Both were to "command all landing and garrison forces when ashore."¹³ The command structure remained substantially the same, for as one student of amphibious warfare has pointed out, "there was a distinction without a difference."¹⁴

The Eniwetok landing force was to be provided by Watson's Tactical Group 1, the FLINTLOCK reserve, which had cruised eastward of Kwajalein Atoll while the Northern and Southern Landing Forces had effected their landings. Tactical Group 1 was composed of the 22d Marines, 106th Infantry (less 2/106, assigned to the Majuro operation), the Army 104th Field Artillery Battalion, the Marine 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion, 2d Separate Tank Company, 2d Separate Motor Transport Company, and 2d Separate Medical Company, plus shore party and JASCO units. After 3 February, when the group entered Kwajalein Atoll, further attachments were made to strengthen Watson's command for the CATCHPOLE Operation. The additions were: VAC Reconnaissance Company, Company D, 4th Tank

Battalion (a scout unit), 102 LVTs and 17 LVT(A)s from the 708th Provisional Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and a provisional DUKW unit, provided by the 7th Infantry Division, with 30 amphibious trucks and 4 LVTs. By the time CATCHPOLE began, General Watson had command over some 10,000 assault troops, more than 4,000 of them soldiers.¹⁵

The tactical group was prepared to handle only such administrative chores as might be incident to combat operations. General Watson's staff was small in size and suited only to brief periods of combat. This so-called "streamlined" staff, partly an experiment and partly the result of a shortage of officers with staff experience, was not adequate to the strain imposed by CATCHPOLE. "I can personally attest," stated the group G-3, "that I and all members of the staff came out of the Eniwetok operation utterly exhausted by day and night effort. The streamlined staff idea died a rapid and just death as the staff itself was about to expire."¹⁶

Colonel John T. Walker's reinforced 22d Marines, the largest single component of Tactical Group 1, had spent almost 18 months as part of the Samoa garrison force prior to its transfer to Hawaii. The regiment had undergone rudimentary amphibious training in preparation for FLINTLOCK. Late in December, the 106th Infantry, two battalions strong, was detached from

¹² BGen Omar T. Pfeiffer memo to BGen Gerald C. Thomas, dtd 23Feb44.

¹³ Cf. TF 51 OPlan A9-44, dtd 7Feb44, p. 9 and TF 51 OPlan A6-43, dtd 17Jan44, p. 15.

¹⁴ Cmt of Dr. Philip A. Crowl quoted in Maj Leonard O. Friesz, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 16Mar53.

¹⁵ The size of Tactical Group 1 varies according to the source consulted. Admiral Turner reported a total of 10,269, 5,760 of them Marines. *TF 51 AR*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Col Wallace M. Greene, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 4Mar53.

the 27th Infantry Division and assigned to Watson's group. The Army unit also received a brief refresher course in amphibious warfare. These exercises, according to the commanding general of the group, were far from realistic. "We were sent to attack a coral atoll," complained General Watson, but "we rehearsed on the large island of Maui on terrain and approaches totally unlike those of the target." Neither artillery shells, naval gunfire, nor aerial bombs added realism to the exercise. The group's artillery battalions did not land from DUKWs, few of the infantrymen landed from LVTs, and the assault teams did not practice moving inland from the beach. "In the attack on Eniwetok," the general concluded, "the infantry, amphibian tractors, amphibian tanks, tanks, aircraft, supporting naval ships, and most of the staffs concerned had never worked together before."¹⁷

As far as the 22d Marines was concerned, thorough training in infantry tactics offset the effect of haphazard rehearsals. Colonel Walker's regiment, in the opinion of the group G-3, was "at its peak in small unit training—training which was anchored firmly around a basic fire team organization (three or four-man teams, depending on the battalion)."¹⁸ Since each rifle squad could be divided into teams, the squad leader's problems of control were greatly eased. In jungle or amid ruined buildings, the teams were cap-

able of fighting independent actions against an enemy pillbox or machine guns. The intense training which it had received in Samoa had made the 22d Marines a spirited, competent unit, one which would distinguish itself in the forthcoming operation.

The 106th Infantry, however, had not received the kind of training that the Marine regiment had undergone in Samoa. An Army officer who was serving in General Smith's VAC planning section, observed that the Army regiment was "far from being in an ideal state of combat readiness." Yet, "many fine and highly trained individuals and small units . . . collectively made up the 106th Infantry."¹⁹

During CATCHPOLE, moreover, Colonel Russell G. Ayers, commanding officer of the 106th Infantry, would labor under still another handicap. He had only two battalions, and if these were committed to an attack, his reserve would have to be provided by the 22d Marines. Thus, the colonel might find himself commanding a hastily combined organization, one third of which was differently trained and unfamiliar to him. "Effective combat units," a member of the VAC staff has pointed out, "are achieved by effective unit training, and can never be replaced by assorted combinations of component units, however highly trained."²⁰

Tactical Group 1, then, had its shortcomings. Its staff was designed to assist the commanding general during brief operations rather than in an involved campaign against a large atoll. The infantry components were not of

¹⁷ TG-1 SplRpt of FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE Ops, dtd 1Mar44, p. 7, hereafter *TG 1 SplRpt*.

¹⁸ Greene ltr of 4Mar53, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Anderson ltr.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

equal quality, nor had they received amphibious training beyond what was necessary for them as FLINTLOCK reserve. Still, this group was available at once, and American planners were determined to sustain the momentum of the Marshalls offensive.

In addition to Tactical Group 1, General Watson, as Commander, Expeditionary Troops, had operational control over the Eniwetok Garrison Forces. Although Hill retained control of the landing force until it was set up ashore, Watson was in overall command of the garrison contingent during the landings. Finding the necessary defense forces proved difficult. No extra occupation units had been included in the FLINTLOCK force, for neither the men nor the transports were available. "When the decision was made to capture Eniwetok without waiting for additional forces," Admiral Turner remarked, "we had to rob both Kwajalein Island and Roi-Namur of considerable proportions of their garrisons and carry them forward in order to start the more urgent development of the new base."²¹ The Marine 10th Defense Battalion, the Army 3d Defense Battalion, and the Army 47th Engineers formed the nucleus of the hastily formed Eniwetok garrison.

INTELLIGENCE

"Before departure from Hawaii our information concerning Eniwetok was scanty," commented Admiral Turner, "we had only a few high altitude photographs . . . and our maritime charts were of small scale made from

ancient surveys."²² Navigational charts, current enough to be considered secret by the Japanese, were captured during the Kwajalein operation. Gradually the photographic coverage was expanded, and the enemy order of battle began to emerge.

A complete aerial mosaic of Eniwetok Atoll would disclose a vast lagoon, which measures 17 by 21 miles, enclosed by a ring of islands and reefs. Both principal entrances to this lagoon, Wide Passage just west of Eniwetok Island and Deep Passage between Parry and Japtan, lie along its southern rim. The largest of the 30-odd islands in the atoll are Eniwetok, Parry, Japtan, and Engebi farther to the north. (See Map 12.)

In its study dated 20 January 1944, JICPOA reported an airstrip, fortifications, and large buildings on Engebi. An installation believed to be a radio direction finder was plotted on the map of Parry, and the stretch of Eniwetok Island bore the legend "no known defenses."²³ Within a few weeks, Admiral Nimitz' intelligence officers were offering more disturbing news.

Late in January, JICPOA noted that a mobile unit of the Japanese Army, some 4,000 men, had sailed eastward from Truk. The strength of the Eniwetok garrison, once reported as 700 men concentrated on Engebi Island, was revised drastically upward. By 10 February, enemy strength throughout the atoll was placed at 2,900-4,000 men. "These estimates are made without the advantage of late photo-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ JICPOA InfoBul No. 3-44, Eniwetok, dtd 20Jan44.

²¹ *Turner ltr II.*

graphs," JICPOA explained. "Good photographs should be able to settle the question of the presence of such a large body of troops and furnish a more reliable basis of estimation."²⁴

The photographs for which JICPOA awaited were taken while FLINTLOCK was in progress. Photo interpreters examined every shadow but discovered few signs of enemy activity. On Engebi, already considered the hub of the enemy defenses, the garrison had improved and extended its network of trenches and foxholes. A few foxholes dug near a collection of storehouses were the only indication that Parry was defended. Eniwetok Island bore the scars of about 50 freshly dug foxholes, and other signs indicated that a small number of Japanese occupied its southwestern tip. In short, the last-minute intelligence belied the presence of a large concentration of troops. Both Parry and Eniwetok Islands appeared weakly held. Whatever strength the enemy had seemed to be massed on Engebi.

TACTICAL AND LOGISTICAL PLANS

The CATCHPOLE plan, prepared in the light of the intelligence available to Admiral Hill and General Watson, bore certain similarities to FLINTLOCK. The operation was divided into four phases, the first of which was the capture of three islands adjacent to Engebi. On 17 February, D-Day, the VAC Reconnaissance Company was to seize CAMELLIA (Aitsu) and CANNA (Rujioru) Islands southeast

of Engebi, while the scouts of Company D, 4th Tank Battalion, took ZINNIA (Bogon) northwest of Engebi. Army and Marine artillery batteries would then land at CANNA and CAMELLIA to support the next phase. On 18 February, the second phase of CATCHPOLE was to begin as the 22d Marines stormed lagoon beaches of Engebi. Two objectives, Eniwetok Island and Parry, were included in phase III. As soon as it was certain that additional troops would not be needed at Engebi, the 106th Infantry was to assault Eniwetok Island.²⁵ The Army objective was considered so poorly defended that the understrength regiment was directed to prepare to move on to Parry within two hours after the Eniwetok landing. Both regiments were scheduled to see action during phase IV, the securing of the remaining islands of the atoll.

Naval gunfire also was to follow a schedule similar to that employed in the Kwajalein landings. On D-Day, destroyers and LCIs were to support operations against the lesser islands, while battleships, cruisers, and other destroyers shelled Engebi from positions outside the lagoon. During the afternoon, two of the battleships would enter the lagoon and assist in shattering the enemy's defenses. On D plus 1, the supporting warships were to de-

²⁴ *TF 51.11 OpRpt*, p. 1.

²⁵ The 106th Infantry commander wanted to land artillery on the island opposite Eniwetok, across Wide Passage, but "Hill and Watson said 'no,' as they did not feel that it was warranted since it would take a day out of the schedule to get set up and that there were not enough signs of a garrison on the island to warrant the move." *Hill interview/comments Marshalls*.

stroy beach defenses and other targets. Pausing only when aerial strikes were being executed, battleships, destroyers, and LCIs would hammer the beaches until the assault craft were 300 yards from Engebi's shore, then shift their fire to bombard for five minutes more the area on the left flank of the landing force. The plan called for a heavy cruiser to interdict enemy movement in the northern part of the island for an hour after the landing.

On the morning of the attack upon Eniwetok Island, which would take place as soon as possible after the securing of Engebi, Admiral Hill's cruisers and destroyers were to deliver some 80 minutes of preparatory fire. The heavy cruisers would rain down both destructive and interdictory fires for 30 minutes, then pause if the scheduled aerial attack was delivered. When the planes had departed, destroyers were to join the cruisers in shelling the island. In 25 minutes, after a second air attack, the close support phase was scheduled to begin, with the cruisers ceasing fire when the LVTs were 1,000 yards from the beach and the destroyers shifting to targets on the flanks when the assault waves were 300 yards from shore. The schedule for the Parry landing differed in that the bombardment would last 100 minutes and that a destroyer would join two cruisers in the 50-minute shelling that preceded the first air strike. At all the objectives, LCI(G)s and LVT(A)s were to assist in neutralizing the beach defenses.

Aerial support of the CATCHPOLE operation was scheduled to begin on D minus 1, when carrier planes attacked and also photographed the principal

islands in Eniwetok Atoll. On the following day, fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo bombers were to attack specified targets on Engebi no earlier than 0800 and no later than 0830. Naval gunfire would be lifted during the strike. Planes were to remain on station over the atoll in the event they were needed to support the day's operations. Any unscheduled strikes would be directed by the airborne coordinator and the Commander, Support Aircraft.

The schedule of strikes in support of the Engebi landing called for the planes to attack perpendicular to the beach 35 minutes before H-Hour. The strike had to be completed within 10 minutes, for naval guns and artillery pieces would resume firing at H minus 25. No definite timetable was prepared for the Eniwetok and Parry Island operations, but Admiral Hill indicated his intention of scheduling similar aerial attacks 50 and 25 minutes before the troops reached shore.

The 22d Marines, assault force for the Engebi landing, was directed to load its assigned LVTs with ammunition and water before the convoy sailed from Kwajalein Atoll. The tractors were to be carried to the target area in LSTs. Off the objective, the Marines would load in LCVPs, move to the LSTs, and there embark in the amphibious vehicles. LVT(A)s, manned like the troop carriers by Army crews, had the mission of helping neutralize the beaches and then supporting the advance inland by landing on the flanks of the assault battalions. The group reserve, provided for Engebi by the 106th Infantry, was to remain in

its transports and, if needed, transfer at sea from LCVPs to LVTs.

General Watson, faced with a series of landings, expected a great deal from his amphibian tractor unit. The 708th Provisional Amphibian Tractor Battalion, a composite Army command which included both armored and unarmored tractors, had a total of 119 vehicles. Of these, 17 were LVT(A) (1)s, 46 LVT(2)s, and 56 LVT(A) (2)s, which were simply LVT(2)s with improved armor. Since 8 to 10 tractors were assigned to each of the four or five waves required by each battalion, the 708th would be required to brave enemy fire time and again.

The method of control prescribed for CATCHPOLE differed little from the system used during the conquest of Kwajalein Atoll. Because of the shortage of LVTs, General Watson directed the amphibian tractor battalion commander to embark in the control vessel. After they had landed the assault troops, all LVTs were to report to this vessel. If reserves were needed ashore, the tractors could be routed to a transfer area behind the line of departure where the troops would load from LCVPs. The evacuation of the wounded was left to the supervision of the beachmaster, and a control officer embarked in an LCI was charged with directing empty supply craft to the proper ships.

DUKWs on loan from the 7th Infantry Division helped ease General Watson's supply problems. Firing batteries of both the 104th Field Artillery and 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion were to land on D-Day in amphibian trucks. When this task was finished, the DUKWs were to re-

port to certain of the LSTs to assist in unloading. Two pontoon causeways brought to the objective by Admiral Hill's transport group could be counted upon to speed the unloading of heavier equipment.

In comparison to the huge FLINT-LOCK expedition, Tactical Group 1 carried few supplies, but enough ammunition, water, food, and fuel were loaded to sustain the men, weapons, and machines for five days. The rations carried in the convoy included a two-day supply of types C and K along with one day's D rations. Once the atoll was secured, the stockpile of food was to be increased until there was a minimum of 60 days' B, 8 days' C or K, and 2 days' D rations on hand.

Since ammunition and water were loaded in the tractors of the assault waves, the build-up of supplies would begin at the moment the troops landed. General Watson also directed that boats, each one loaded with a different kind of item, begin collecting at the line of departure as the fourth wave was moving toward the island under attack. Every boat was to fly a particular flag to indicate whether it carried ammunition, rations, fuel, water, or medical supplies. Requests from shore were to be routed through the beachmaster's radio net to the group logistical control officer who would then direct the appropriate landing craft to the proper beach.

The shore party organization appeared to be the weakest part of the logistical scheme. Major John F. Schoettel, the Betio veteran who commanded the composite shore party unit, would have to rely on "low priority combat personnel" to augment his or-

ganization.²⁶ The additional men were to be provided by the battalion upon whose beach the shore party component was working.

Plans and preparations for CATCH-POLE had been completed in a remarkably brief time. Only five days elapsed between Admiral Nimitz' arrival at Kwajalein and General Watson's issuance of his basic operation order; two days later, Admiral Hill's order was dispatched. The enemy too had been busy, trying frantically to convert Eniwetok into a series of fortified islands.

*THE JAPANESE PREPARE*²⁷

The Japanese were slow to begin fortifying Eniwetok Atoll. The war against the United States had been raging for 11 months before 300 construction workers landed at Engebi Island to begin work on an airstrip. In December, 500 Korean laborers joined this original detachment. The runway was completed in mid-1943, and most of the men who built it promptly sailed for Kwajalein. Meanwhile, the first troops, a few sailors of the *61st Guard Force* who arrived from Kwajalein in January 1943, had established lookout stations on Eniwetok and Engebi Islands. By October 1943, a detachment from the Kwajalein guard force had come ashore to garrison the atoll.

Aerial photographs taken late in

²⁶ TG 1 SP Plan, dtd 10Feb44, Anx L to TG-1 OpO 2-44, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA Buls 89-44, Japanese Def of Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 12Jun44, and 88-44, 1st PhibBrig, Japanese Army, dtd 5Jun44.

December showed little activity at Eniwetok Atoll. At the time, Warrant Officer Masimori Osano, in command at the atoll guard detachment, had no more than 61 men at his disposal. He assigned 10 of these to man a picket boat, sent 5 to the lookout station on Eniwetok Island, and retained the rest on Engebi, where a total of three lookout posts had been established. To defend Engebi, he had a pair of 120mm guns with about 87 rounds of ammunition, machine guns, rifles, pistols, and hand grenades.

The airstrip itself lay idle until November, when it was pressed into service as a maintenance stop for planes being ferried westward. Accommodations had been built for more than 300 aviation officers and men, but fewer than 50 mechanics or other specialists were on hand by the end of 1943. Although the atoll appeared quiet to the intelligence officers who studied the earliest American photographs, Eniwetok soon would become the scene of hectic activity.

On 4 January 1944, the convoy carrying the *1st Amphibious Brigade* dropped anchor in Eniwetok lagoon to land 2,586 troops and 95 civilian employees of the unit. The brigade boasted three infantry battalions, each with its own mortar, artillery, and engineer components, plus automatic cannon, tank, engineer, signal, and medical units. One battalion reinforced by elements of the brigade signal, engineer, and medical detachments had been detached for service elsewhere in the Marshalls.

Under strict secrecy, this Army amphibious organization had been detached from the *Kwantung Army* in

Manchuria and routed to the Marshalls by way of Fusan in Korea, Saeki in the home islands, and finally Truk.²⁸ JICPOA had noted the arrival of the convoy at Truk but had been unable to track it farther eastward. Documents captured at Kwajalein and prisoner of war interrogations placed the bulk of the brigade at Eniwetok.

Major General Yoshima Nishida, the brigade commander, found the atoll almost defenseless, a condition he immediately began correcting. "We have been working without sleep or rest on the unloading,"²⁹ complained one of Nishida's men on the day after his arrival, but this back-breaking labor marked only the beginning of a hectic period of construction. The Japanese general inspected the atoll, dispatched garrisons to the various islands, and put the troops to work throwing up fortifications.

Additional help came on 13 January, when 200 Okinawan laborers, probably destined for Kwajalein, paused at Eniwetok. Nishida promptly put these men to work alongside the soldiers and the 200 or more Koreans who had remained behind when the airfield construction detachment was transferred. The mechanics and other aviation technicians on Engebi were probably of little help, for these men were in the process of being withdrawn. Evacuees from Kwajalein, however, temporarily swelled the numbers of the aviation unit, and when the American

warships entered the lagoon many were trapped on the atoll.³⁰

The general selected Parry as the site of his command post. Here he concentrated 1,115 combat troops and 232 civilians, aviation mechanics, laborers, and members of a naval survey party. The island garrison force was a 197-man rifle company supported by mortar crews, artillerymen, and engineers—305 men in all. Also present on the island was the brigade reserve, with which he could reinforce the other islands. Since an engineer and an antiaircraft unit were deployed to Eniwetok Island prior to the American attack, the reserve numbered only 810 by D-Day. The two reserve rifle companies at Nishida's disposal were reinforced by tank, signal, medical, engineer, and automatic cannon units.

Although the enemy expended a tremendous effort to fortify Parry, he accomplished comparatively little. The Japanese, who lacked both time and heavy equipment, suffered from the effects of short rations and an unfamiliar climate. "In all units," wrote a Japanese who visited Parry, "there are many men suffering from exhaustion. The infirmary is full."³¹ The foxholes and trenches which the troops hastily gouged out of the island soil were not lined with rocks or logs, as were the few positions dug before the arrival of the brigade. Often a series of emplacements were linked to form a "spider web." The enemy would con-

²⁸ JICPOA Item No. 7811, Diary of 2dLt Kakino, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7811*.

²⁹ JICPOA Item No. 7603, Excerpts from a Diary of a Member of the 1st PhibBrig, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7603*.

³⁰ On D-Day over 200 such troops were stranded on Parry, Engebi, and Eniwetok Islands. All pilots en route westward from the outer Marshalls had already been evacuated.

³¹ *JICPOA Item 7603*.

struct a large log-protected bunker sunk close to the surface of the earth. Tunnels led from the shelter to an outlying ring of foxholes, and these holes also were connected by other tunnels. The log-roofed bunker itself and the open foxholes were concealed by strips of corrugated iron covered in turn with a layer of sand. The defenders might take refuge in the large shelters during a shelling, then deploy to the foxholes, lift the roofs and open fire. A spider web, carefully camouflaged, was scarcely visible from the ground, let alone from high-flying photographic planes. Although fortifications on Parry were weaker than the steel-and-concrete pillboxes found on other atolls, they were the best Nishida's men could prepare.

The next largest garrison was that on Engebi, where the general had stationed a rifle company and support elements, which included mortars, tanks, and artillery. In addition to the 692 soldiers from the brigade, Engebi boasted 44 members of *61st Guard Force*, and 540 laborers, civilians, and support troops. The existing 120mm guns were incorporated into the defensive scheme, as were the few poor-quality pillboxes. The garrison, however, dug new trenches and foxholes along the lagoon coast.

The Eniwetok Island force consisted of a 779-man composite unit provided by General Nishida plus 24 civilians and 5 lookouts from the naval guard force. This smallest of the atoll garrisons had dug the most durable entrenchments. Mines were planted, and work on a system of concrete pillboxes was begun but never completed.

General Nishida clung to the Japa-

nese tactical doctrine of destroying the invader at the beaches. "If the enemy lands, make use of the positions you are occupying during the daytime," he directed. "Endeavor to reduce losses, and at night strike terror into the enemy's heart by charges and destroy his will to fight."³² Colonel Toshio Yano, in command at Engebi, was convinced the Americans would enter the lagoon, seize islands adjacent to the one he was charged with defending, and then storm the lagoon beaches. In keeping with Nishida's overall plan, the colonel ordered his garrison to "lure the enemy to the water's edge and then annihilate him with withering fire power and continuous attacks."³³

The Japanese, most of their defensive installations undetected by American cameras, awaited Watson's soldiers and Marines. Including the crews of stranded vessels, Nishida's force totaled approximately 3,500 men. Not all were trained for combat, but each of them, with the possible exception of the Korean and Okinawan laborers, would fight to the death.

PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS³⁴

The first carrier strikes against Eniwetok Atoll were delivered in conjunction with the FLINTLOCK operation, for the Engebi field had to be

³² JICPOA Item No. 6637, 1st PhibBrig Plans for Defending Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 28Dec43.

³³ JICPOA Item No. 7539, 3d PhibBn OpO A-38, dtd 10Feb44.

³⁴ Additional sources for this section include: Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *The Gilberts and Marshalls*.

neutralized to prevent enemy planes from refueling there to bomb the Kwajalein task force. On 30 January, the Americans destroyed the 15 medium bombers based at Engebi and sunk several small craft in Eniwetok lagoon. Between 1 and 7 February, additional raids battered the objective, and the planes returned on the 11th and 13th. These earlier attacks leveled most of the structures built above ground on the various islands. The preparatory strikes began on 16 February, as Admiral Hill's ships neared the lagoon.

Life for the enemy garrison was hell on earth. "When such a small island as Engebi is hit by about 130 bombs a day, and, having lost its ammunition and provisions, lies helpless, it is no wonder that some soldiers have gone out of their minds." The island defenders, this same diarist admitted, were surviving on a single ball of rice each day, for their food had to be sent from Parry in outriggers under cover of darkness. The soldier thought of his family seated at dinner somewhere in Japan: ". . . my family's joy helps me to bear these hardships, when I realize that it is because of just such hardships as these I am now suffering that they are able to eat their rice cakes in peace."³⁵

Conditions were not quite so desperate on Parry, where an occasional issue of rice wine spiced the reduced rations, nor on Eniwetok Island, but the Japanese knew that death was fast approaching. Lieutenant Kakino of the Parry garrison read somber portents in a raid of 12 February. "We cele-

brated the anniversary of the coronation of the Emperor Jimmu, this fourth year of our holy war, under enemy air attack. There must be some meaning for us in that."³⁶

While the defenders of Eniwetok Atoll dug and wondered, American forces were attempting to isolate the objective. Army bombers attacked the eastern Carolines, concentrating on Ponape and Kusaie. The most dangerous of the Japanese bases, however, appeared to be Truk, 669 miles southwest of Eniwetok. This enemy Gibraltar of the Pacific was to be neutralized by Task Force 58, commanded during this action by Admiral Spruance himself.

On 17 February, D-Day at Eniwetok, carrier planes began a 2-day hammering of Truk. The aviators sank 2 auxiliary cruisers, a destroyer, 2 submarine tenders, an aircraft ferry, 6 tankers, and 17 merchantmen, a total of about 200,000 tons of shipping. Over 200 Japanese aircraft were damaged or destroyed. The blow at Truk also included a series of one-sided surface actions in which Spruance's battleships, cruisers, and destroyers sank a light cruiser, a destroyer, a trawler, and a submarine chaser. The larger units of the Imperial Navy had left Truk prior to the raid.

Tactical Group 1, without the benefit of last-minute rehearsals, boarded the transports of Admiral Hill's task group and on 15 February set sail for Eniwetok. The voyage proved uneventful; neither enemy planes nor submarines tried to contest Hill's approach. In the morning darkness of

³⁵ JICPOA Item 7603.

³⁶ JICPOA Item 7811.

17 February, a soldier on Parry Island looked up and "from the sea toward the east . . . saw a light and heard something like airplane motors." As daybreak approached, warships began shelling the atoll. "I thought to myself," he

wrote in his diary, "that finally what must come has come."³⁷ The battle for Eniwetok had begun.

³⁷ JICPOA Item No. 7005, Diary of WO Shionaya, hereafter *JICPOA Item 7005*.

The CATCHPOLE Operation

*CATCHPOLE AND THE LESSER MARSHALLS*¹

During the early morning of 17 February, an air alarm sounded on Parry Island, and as the defenders sought cover, naval shells came screaming into the island. The bombardment reached its height shortly after sunrise, or so it seemed to the enemy. At 0915, the Japanese watched Hill's bombardment group steam boldly into the lagoon to continue their firing. American planes joined in the action, so that the enemy garrison had no respite from the deluge of explosives. "There were one man killed and four wounded in our unit during today's fighting," noted one of the defenders. "There were some who were buried by shells from the

ships, but we survived by taking care in the light of past experience. How many times must we bury ourselves in the sand?"²

To American eyes, the hammering of Parry, Engebi, Japtan, and Eniwetok Islands was equally impressive. After 28 moored mines, the first encountered in Central Pacific operations, had been cleared from Wide Passage, Hill's landing ships entered the lagoon. At the same time, the heavy vessels of the task group were passing through Deep Passage, whose current, Hill's staff had judged, was too swift to allow moored mines.³ "To see the force enter this lagoon in column through a narrow entrance and between the shores of islands on either flank, and steam something over 20 miles through the enemy lagoon was," in the words of Admiral Hill's operations officer, "one of the most thrilling episodes which I witnessed during the entire war."⁴

The expedition had gained entry to Eniwetok lagoon without opposition from hostile batteries, although the big ships passed within 200 yards of Parry. Once the maneuver had been completed, a veil of tension was lifted from the task group. Ashore, however, the enemy realized that the decisive

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; VAC Cmts on *TG 1 SAR*, dtd 1Apr44; VAC NGF Rpt on CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 17Mar44; *TG 1 SAR*, including TG 1 Rpt of Atk on Eniwetok Atoll, dtd 27Feb44; *TG 1 SplRpt*, including VAC ReconCo AR, n.d., Co D (Sct), 4th TkBn AR, n.d., and SplRpt of Casualties and Prisoners, dtd 23Feb44; TG 1 URpts, 1800, 16Feb44-1800, 23Feb44; TG 1 Jnl, 4Nov43-23Feb44, hereafter *TG 1 Jnl*; 22d Mar WarD 1Jan-29Feb44; 1/22 Rpt on FLINTLOCK [actually CATCHPOLE] Op, n.d.; 2/22 Rec of Events, Feb44; 3/22 Rpt on CATCHPOLE Op, dtd 10Apr44, Encl to Capt Buenos A. W. Young ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar53; Heintz and Crown, *The Marshalls*; Crowl and Love, *Gilberts and Marshalls*.

² JICPOA Item 7005.

³ Hill interview/comments *Marshalls*.

⁴ Capt Claude V. Ricketts, USN, ltr to CMC, dtd 9Mar53.

moment had come. General Nishida reported the entry of the task group to Tokyo and futilely requested reinforcements.⁵

THE PRELIMINARY LANDINGS

While the battleships were concentrating their fire against the larger islands, the destroyers *Heermann* and *McCord* bombarded CAMELLIA and CANNA. As the Marines of the VAC Reconnaissance Company were preparing to transfer from the APD *Kane* to the LST that carried their six amphibian tractors, word came of a change in plans. The boats carrying the company followed these latest instructions and shaped courses toward LST 29. There the unit learned that the original scheme was still in effect, so off the company went to LST 272, the ship first prescribed in its orders. (See Map 12.)

Two LCIs supported Captain Jones' command as it headed toward CAMELLIA and CANNA. Jones, with two other officers and 57 men, landed on CAMELLIA at 1320 and promptly reported that neither Japanese nor natives were on the island. The only difficulty was that encountered by two of the Army-manned LVTs, which had a hard time plowing through the sand beyond the beach. A similar group, 4 officers and 57 men, landed 10 minutes later on CANNA. This second island yielded 25 natives but no Japanese.

Captain Jones found the villagers to be friendly, cooperative, and in possession of what proved to be fairly accurate information. He forwarded to

General Watson the natives' estimate that 1,000 combat troops guarded each of three major objectives of Tactical Group 1. An additional 1,000 laborers were believed located on Engebi.

The reconnaissance company now began investigating other islands southeast of Engebi. Five landings were made, but no Japanese were encountered. While Jones' Marines were patrolling, artillery units began landing on CAMELLIA and CANNA.

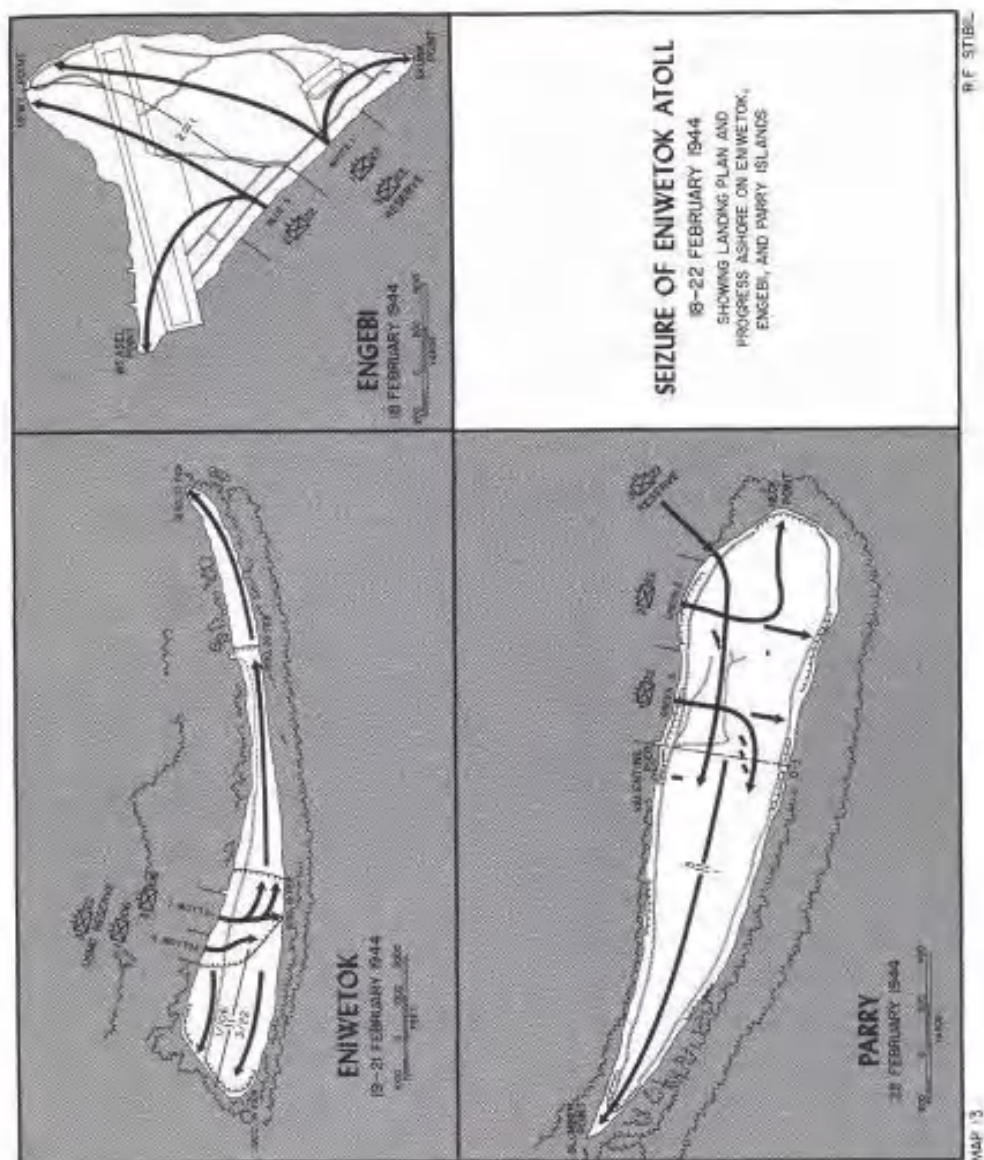
The reconnaissance and survey party sent by the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion to CAMELLIA found the island covered with undergrowth but lost little time in selecting firing positions. General Watson, however, feared that the battalion would land too late to register before dark, for the 104th Artillery, bound for CANNA, was making better progress. Actually, both battalions were ashore in time to complete registration by 1902.⁶

While the artillery units were selecting base points and check points as well as plotting harassing fires for the evening of D-Day, underwater demolition teams, screened by naval gunfire, were examining the beaches off Engebi. Leaping from LVTs when the tractors were about 100 yards from the lagoon coast, the Navy men swam to within 50 yards of the shoreline. They located no artificial obstacles on either Blue or White Beach. (See Map 13.)

In the last operation planned for D-Day, Tactical Group 1 ordered the 4th Marine Division scout company to seize ZINNIA, just west of Engebi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, citing a message intercept.

⁶ LtGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to CMC, dtd 1Mar53; MajGen John T. Walker ltr to CMC, dtd 3Apr53, hereafter *Walker ltr.*



In the darkness, the scouts, buffeted by a 25-mile wind and 8-foot waves, were unable to paddle to the island for which they were aiming.⁷ A landing on a neighboring islet gave them an opportunity to reach their original objective, and at 0327 ZINNIA was in American hands. Now the Japanese could not prolong the battle by retreating from island to island. The first phase of CATCHPOLE came to a successful close. The invaders had suffered no losses and encountered no opposition.

THE ATTACK ON ENGEBI

General Watson's plan for 18 February designated 1/22, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Walfried H. Fromhold, and 2/22, under Lieutenant Colonel Donn C. Hart, to storm Engebi, while Major Clair W. Shisler's 3/22 remained in reserve. The 1st Battalion was to seize Beach White 1, immediately to the right of a pier that jutted into the lagoon from the southern shore of the triangular-shaped island. Blue 3, objective of the 2d Battalion, lay just to the left of the pier. The boundary between battalions followed the trail that led northward from the pier to a junction with a second trail. The boundary followed the left fork to the vicinity of the airstrip and then curved slightly toward Newt Point, the terrain feature farthest from the landing beaches. (See Map 13.)

Both assault battalions were reinforced for the operation. The 2d Sep-

arate Tank Company⁸ and an Army platoon of two self-propelled 105mm guns were kept under regimental control. Also, the Marine pack howitzers and the Army 105mm howitzers were to support Colonel Walker's regiment.

Since most of the runway lay within Hart's zone of action, his unit would advance across comparatively open terrain. Shattered buildings just inland of the beaches and a stand of coconut trees near Newt Point were the principal obstacles in the path of 2/22. Most of the enemy troops were located in the 1st Battalion zone in the large coconut grove near the center of the island. Permanent pillboxes had been built at the three corners of the objective, and entrenchments were scattered all along the coastline.

On D-Day, the Engebi garrison had received a severe battering from bombs and naval shells. "One of our ammunition dumps was hit and went up with a terrifying explosion," read the final diary entry of one of the island defenders. "At 1300 the ammunition depot of the artillery in the palm forest caught fire and exploded, and a conflagration started in the vicinity of the western positions."⁹ During the night, Army and Marine field artillery batteries harassed the weary Japanese, and at 0655 on 18 February the fire-

⁸ This unit was equipped with medium tanks obtained from the Army. In six weeks, the Marine crews painted, water-proofed, and otherwise modified the vehicles—in addition to undergoing training. Maj Robert S. Reinhardt, Jr. ltr to CMC, dtd 18Mar53, hereafter *Reinhardt ltr*.

⁹ JICPOA Item No. 8200, Extracts from the Diary of Norio Miyada.

⁷ Col Edward L. Katzenbach, Jr., ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 25Sep62.

support ships began their final bombardment. W-Hour was scheduled for 0845.

Reveille sounded for the 22d Marines at 0400. As the naval guns were flaying Engebi, the two artillery battalions fired their planned concentrations, and Colonel Walker's Marines transferred to vehicles manned by the provisional amphibian tractor battalion. Planes from the escort carrier group delivered their 10-minute strike at about 0800. Midway through the aerial attack, the first assault waves crossed the line of departure, and when the planes had made their final run over the objective, the warships resumed firing.

The boat landing plan called for the tractors to employ a formation similar to that used at Kwajalein Island. The LVTs formed a W in the wake of the LCIs, with the troop carriers at its base and five of the LVT(A)s on each of the projecting wings. At the base of the formation, between the two battalions, were seven additional armored amphibians.

As the 22d Marines bored through the waves, the LCIs hammered the beaches with 40mm shells. Unfortunately, the rockets launched from the gunboats to neutralize the coastal defenses fell short and exploded in the surf. Smoke and dust obscured the vision of tractor drivers and caused some vehicles to wander from course. Mechanical failures, not surprising since the same LVTs had taken part in the several phases of the southern Kwajalein operation, also slowed the first wave of 1/22. In spite of these difficulties, the first of the tractors

reached Engebi some two minutes before the scheduled W-Hour.¹⁰

The armored amphibians and the first wave of tractors were to have advanced inland to a road that ran parallel to the lagoon coast, but fallen coconut trees and other debris stalled the vehicles. They were able, however, to support the advance by firing from positions just across the beaches. Although the attack lost some of its initial momentum, the enemy remained too dazed from the effects of the preliminary bombardment to contain the Marines.¹¹

On the right of the pier, Fromhold's 1st Battalion advanced with Company B on the left and Company A on the right. Behind them, Company C thrust toward Skunk Point in an effort to secure the southeastern corner of the island. During the movement to White 1, the LVTs carrying one platoon of Company A had broken down, so that unit was late in landing. The platoon hurried into position, but as the battalion swept inland, a gap opened between Companies A and C, an opening which the Japanese discovered by accident.

Under relentless pressure from Company C, many of the defenders of Skunk Point sought to escape northward. In doing so, they found themselves within the gap and in position to fire into the exposed flank of Company A. Since this unit was just entering the tangled undergrowth of the coconut grove, an area riddled with spider web

¹⁰ *Walker ltr*; Capt William G. Wendell, Notes of Interview with LtCol Walfried H. Fromhold, n.d., hereafter *Fromhold interview*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

defenses, it could do little to protect its dangling flank. The battalion commander checked the advance of Companies A and B until a platoon of tanks could be dispatched to the scene.¹²

On the opposite side of the pier, Hart's 2/22 thrust rapidly inland after a somewhat confused landing. Although a few tractors had landed as much as 200 yards out of position, junior officers and noncommissioned officers quickly led their men to the proper zones. As soon as order had been restored, the advance got underway.

Companies E and F spearheaded the attack of 2/22. These Marines paused at the nearer edge of the runway while artillery concentrations blanketed the area in front of them. Elements of the 2d Separate Tank Company joined, and when the barrage lifted, both armor and infantry plunged forward. The arrival of the Marine armor proved fortunate, for the Japanese were using light tanks as make-shift pillboxes in this area. Although the enemy tanks were firing from earthen emplacements, they could not survive American shells.

Once the Japanese armor had been silenced, the Marines dashed rapidly toward the opposite shore, bypassing many knots of enemy resistance. Fifteen Japanese were killed attempting to flee across the level ground. A handful of men of Company F reached the coast approximately 300 yards east of Weasel Point, the southwestern tip of Engebi. When this was reported to Major Robert P. Felker, the battalion executive officer, he exclaimed: "My

gosh, Fox Company is trying to take the whole island." ¹³ By 1030, when Colonel Walker came ashore, resistance in the 2d Battalion zone was confined to Weasel and Newt Points.

The news which the regimental commander received from the other battalion was not quite so encouraging. Company A, receiving severe fire from the wooded area to its front and from the Japanese within the gap on its right, lacked enough men to push onward. When contact with Company C had been broken, one platoon of Company A had become separated from its parent unit.¹⁴ In addition, the company had been suffering light casualties throughout the morning, and this steady attrition gradually sapped its strength. Since 3/22 was already ashore on White 1, one of its rifle companies was attached to 1/22. Fromhold ordered the fresh unit, Company I, to prepare to pass through Company A.¹⁵

While tanks were assisting a part of Company C in sealing the gap, Company B continued its advance. To keep the attack moving, Fromhold ordered Company I forward and directed the remnants of Company A to mop up. The task facing Company I was grim, for the ground to its front was covered by dense underbrush and fallen trees which screened a series of open trenches and spider web emplacements.

These positions were extremely difficult to locate, for the defenders had

¹³ Reinhardt ltr.

¹⁴ LtCol Glenn E. Martin memo to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Mar53, Subj: Eniwetok.

¹⁵ Fromhold interview.

¹² Fromhold interview.



THREE WAVES of 22d Marines assault troops approach Engebi as smoke and dust from the preliminary bombardment drifts across landing lanes. (USMC A411182)



NAVY FIGHTER PLANE attacks enemy positions ahead of Marines during the fighting at Eniwetok Atoll. (USCG 26-WA-6G-8)

placed pieces of driftwood over their foxholes and the firing ports of their bunkers. The Japanese could push open these "doors" without exposing themselves to Marine riflemen. If a sniper was spotted, he would retreat into the underground maze connecting the several holes that made up a spider web. The attacking Marines soon hit upon a method of destroying completely these underground defenses. When the bunker at the center of the web had been located, a member of the assault team would hurl a smoke grenade inside. Although this type of missile did no harm to the Japanese within, it released a cloud of vapor which rolled through the tunnels and escaped around the loose-fitting covers of the foxholes. Once the outline of the web was known, the bunker and all its satellite positions could be shattered with demolitions.¹⁶ In this way, Fromhold's command punched its way forward.

Near Skunk Point, however, 1/22 encountered concrete pillboxes which were the key to the enemy defenses around the southeastern corner of the island. Two self-propelled 105mm guns from the 106th Infantry Cannon Company, weapons originally sent to the aid of Company A, were withdrawn upon request of Company C and sent to deal with the heavy fortifications. The self-propelled guns fired almost their entire day's allowance of ammunition, 80 rounds, in order to destroy two pillboxes, one of which sheltered 25 to 30 Japanese.

Effective as they were, the self-propelled 105s were not especially popular

with the infantry units which they supported. "They made a very inviting target for mortar and other small arms," commented a veteran of the Skunk Point fighting, "and, consequently, were not a very comforting thing to have around."¹⁷ The 105s, though, had revenge on their Japanese tormentors, for during the afternoon they wiped out an enemy mortar crew.

While 1/22 was battling to secure its portion of Engebi Island, 2/22 overran Weasel Point and that part of Newt Point to the left of the battalion boundary. Both were reported in American hands at 1310, but the fight for the northern corner of the island had been bitter. Woods and undergrowth concealed a maze of underground positions from which enemy riflemen claimed many victims.

General Watson landed at 1400 and 50 minutes later declared that Engebi was secured. Six minutes later, 1/22 reported that Skunk Point had been overrun; only the right-hand portion of Newt Point remained in Japanese hands. The general then ordered 3/22 and the 2d Separate Tank Company to reembark for the Eniwetok Island operation. These units began loading at 1700. Although Company I was thus withdrawn from his control, Fromhold's Companies A and B secured the remainder of Newt Point by 1830.

While the battle for Engebi was raging, the reconnaissance and scout companies continued their exploration of the nearby islands. The two units made a total of eight landings, captur-

¹⁶ Martin memo, *op. cit.*; Walker ltr.

¹⁷ Maj Thomas D. Scott ltr to CMC, n.d., hereafter *Scott ltr.*

ing in the process one Japanese soldier. Machine gun fire wounded three members of the contingent sent to ARBUTUS (Muzinbaarikku),¹⁸ but the bullets were proved to be "overs" aimed at the enemy on Skunk Point.

As night descended upon Eniwetok atoll, General Watson and his staff issued necessary modifications to the group operation order. After analyzing the latest information, stories told by natives that indicated the presence of 1,000 men and a captured brigade document listing a 600-man garrison, the group commander alerted Colonel Ayers' 106th Infantry to prepare for the following day's attack against Eniwetok Island. The regiment would land two battalions abreast instead of in a column of battalions as originally planned. Neither component of the 106th was to be withdrawn until the objective was secured. The general attached 3/22 and the group tank company to reinforce the Army unit. Once this objective had been captured, the composite regiment was to get ready for the Parry operation. Although casualty figures were not complete, fragmentary reports indicated that the 22d Marines had lost 64 killed, 158 wounded, and 81 missing during the Engebi battle. Since the 3d Battalion had committed only one company on 18 February, its losses would not prevent its subsequent use at Eniwetok Island.

While General Watson looked ahead to phase III, Lieutenant Colonels

Fromhold and Hart could view the afternoon's action with satisfaction. The swift overrunning of the island did not leave "the enemy an opportunity to reorganize resistance."¹⁹ There were plenty of individual Japanese who had been bypassed, but they had no semblance of organization. According to the Task Group 1 report, "isolated snipers and pillboxes and Japanese who were in underground shelters" survived the day's fighting. "These positions," the report continued, "were methodically reduced."²⁰ To those who remained on Engebi on the night of 18-19 February, the surviving enemy seemed far from isolated.

Under cover of night, the Japanese crept from their underground shelters and opened fire with grenade dischargers, rifles, and automatic weapons. Those who had lost their weapons helped themselves to the Japanese and American rifles, grenades, and ammunition that lay scattered throughout the island.²¹ As one Marine officer phrased it, "snipers and by-passed areas made movement to and from the front lines exceedingly difficult and resulted in many enemy contacts and a generally uncomfortable first night. . . ." ²² On 19 February, after a formal flag raising, demolition teams and flamethrower operators from the group engineer unit joined the infantry in the systematic destruction of the stubborn Japanese. Over 1,200 Japanese, Okinawans, and Koreans

¹⁸ BGen Donn C. Hart ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 13Nov62.

¹⁹ TG 1 Rpt, p. 5, in *TG 1 SAR*.

²⁰ *Fromhold interview*.

²¹ LtCol John P. Lanigan memo to LtCol John A. Crown, n.d., Subj: Eniwetok.

²² One of these men died as a result of his wounds en route from the beach to the hospital ship. LtCol Merwin H. Silverthorn, Jr., ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 12Sep62.

were on Engebi when the battle began; only 19 of them surrendered.

PHASE III: ENIWETOK ISLAND

The objective selected for 19 February, Eniwetok Island, is shaped like a war club, its heavy end resting against Wide Passage. The long axis of the island extends from the lagoon entrance northeastward toward neighboring Parry. At Y-Hour, 0900, Colonel Ayers' soldiers were to storm Beaches Yellow 1 and Yellow 2 on the lagoon coast at the thicker end of the club. On the right, 1/106, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Winslow Cornett, was to cross to the farther shore, then secure that portion of the island between the beachhead and Wide Passage. Lieutenant Colonel Harold I. Mizony's 3/106 would thrust to the ocean coast and then use one company to defend the left flank of the beachhead. The remainder of Mizony's command was to remain inland of the Yellow Beaches, ready to assist Cornett's battalion. When the wider portion of the island had been overrun, Cornett faced the task of attacking through Mizony's blocking position with one rifle company and securing the remainder of the objective. The regimental reserve, Shisler's 3/22, was directed to remain afloat off the Yellow Beaches in the event it was needed. The 104th Field Artillery was to land as promptly as possible, move into position, and register to support the Parry landing, an operation tentatively scheduled to begin as soon as Eniwetok Island had come under American control. (See Map 13.)

During phases I and II, Eniwetok Island was battered by bombs and shells. As early as D-Day, one of the garrison soldiers had admitted that "If such raids keep up, they will intimidate us. . . ." ²³ The ordeal continued, but the defenders of Eniwetok were not forced to endure as heavy a weight of high explosives as was showered on Engebi and Parry. None of the battleships turned their guns upon Eniwetok; the cruisers and destroyers fired 1,094 8-inch rounds and 4,348 of 5-inch. These shells struck in an area of approximately 130 acres. In contrast, Engebi, some 220 acres, had shuddered under 497 16-inch, 954 14-inch, 673 8-inch, and 4,641 5-inch projectiles. Parry would receive an even heavier bombardment. Although the pounding which the defenders of Eniwetok Island dreaded so intensely was continued into the morning of D plus 2, the garrison, as events would prove, was far from intimidated.

The timetable which Tactical Group 1 was striving to follow imposed a special hardship on the 2d Separate Tank Company, the LCMs assigned to it, and the LSD *Ashland* from which the landing craft operated. Because maneuvering the *Ashland* in the darkness was believed too dangerous, the LCMs, guided by a submarine chaser, were directed to carry the rearmed and refueled tanks from Engebi to Eniwetok Island. Admiral Hill twice postponed Y-Hour to give the armor ample time in which to complete the 25-mile voyage, and the LCMs arrived by 0900,

²³ JICPOA Item No. 6808, excerpts from the Diary of Cpl Masamichi Kitama.

the time originally fixed for the landings.²⁴

The bombardment and aerial strikes were executed according to schedule, and at 0909 Hill ordered the two battalions of the 106th Infantry to cross the line of departure. The soldiers gained the Yellow Beaches at 0916. Armored amphibians, ordered to move 100 yards inland, thundered forward a short distance and were halted by a 9-foot embankment. The infantrymen scrambled from their LVTs, some of which had landed out of position, and found themselves confronted by an intricate network of spider webs similar to that which 1/22 had encountered on Engebi.

Mizony's 3/106 had the easier going, for by 1030 a part of one company had reached the ocean shore. In spite of admonitions from General Watson to "push your attack" and "clear beaches,"²⁵ Colonel Ayers' troops could make little progress elsewhere in the regimental zone. By noon, the 106th Infantry had won a beachhead that extended from the left flank of Yellow 1 directly across the island, included some 250 yards of the ocean coastline, and then meandered in an irregular fashion toward the right flank of Yellow 2.

A stubborn enemy, a series of defenses that emerged undamaged from the preliminary bombardment, plus the inadequate rehearsal and lack of amphibious experience combined to rob the regimental attack of its momentum. The Japanese were quick to seize this opportunity to strike back. Lieuten-

ant Colonel Masahiro Hashida withdrew about half of his command into the defensive network dug near the southwestern corner of the island and sent the other half creeping through the underbrush toward Cornett's battalion. Early in the afternoon, 300-400 Japanese leaped up and hit 1/106 on both sides of the trail that ran parallel to the lagoon shoreline.

Although the enemy had the twin advantages of surprise and accurate mortar fire, his penetrations of the American line were short-lived. The fighting was bitter and brief; by 1245 the soldiers had beaten off the Japanese. Cornett's troops, however, reported 63 casualties. Hashida's thrust had been vigorous enough to convince Colonel Ayers that a single battalion could not overrun the southwestern end of the island. Since he had already ordered Mizony's battalion to attack instead of remaining on the defensive as planned, the regimental commander had no choice but to commit his reserve. Major Shisler was directed to land 3/22 during the afternoon, relieve a portion of Cornett's unit, and assume responsibility for the left half of the island. The Marine unit also was charged with maintaining lateral contact during the attack. At approximately 1515, the two battalions began advancing toward Hashida's redoubt.

As daylight waned, Shisler's troops collided with a series of log emplacements carefully hidden in the dense underbrush. These positions had survived naval shells and were impervious to damage from mortar rounds. Marine infantrymen and engineers finally killed or at least stunned the

²⁴ USS *Ashland* Eniwetok AR, dtd 3 May 44.

²⁵ TG 1 Jnl, msgs nos. 6 and 8, 18-19 Feb 44.

defenders with bursts from flame-throwers and with satchel charges. Shisler continued to press the attack, but progress was slow.

Across the battalion boundary, which was a line drawn on a map rather than a recognizable terrain feature, 1/106 plodded onward. Cornett's troops lagged a short distance behind the Marines, so a gap soon was opened between the units. To the rear, elements of the 104th Artillery were beginning to come ashore.

Ayers, having experienced a counter-attack earlier in the day, was determined to prevent the Japanese from striking again under cover of darkness. At 1850 the regimental commander informed all battalions that they were to "advance until you have reached the end of island. Call for illumination when necessary."²⁶ At dusk, as the artillery was beginning to register from positions to the rear, a few of the six light tanks attached to the 106th Infantry that had landed at 1745, reported for orders at Shisler's command post.²⁷

When the commander of 3/22 told the officer in charge of the tanks that the attack was to continue throughout the night, the leader of the armored unit, knowing his vehicles were ineffective in the dark, ordered

them to the rear.²⁸ Since the tanks would be of no help and the illumination of this portion of the battlefield had not yet begun, Shisler ordered his battalion to defend from its present positions. On the right, however, 1/106 kept plodding along, advancing through an area pockmarked with covered foxholes.

At 1945, Cornett reported that his battalion was in contact with Shisler's Marines, but as the Army unit moved forward, contact once again was broken. By 0333, Cornett's command occupied a 3-company perimeter at the tip of the island along the lagoon coast. The commander of 1/106 indicated that his unit was on line with the adjacent battalion.²⁹ Actually the Marine flank lay over 100 yards to the left rear of the Army position.

Throughout the night, the Marine battalion fought off sporadic attempts at infiltration. When the skies grew light enough, they looked to their right and were startled to discover that the Army battalion had vanished. The soldiers had executed an order which one of Holland Smith's planners, an Army colonel, later branded as "absurd."³⁰ Darkness prevented 1/106

²⁶ Capt Donald J. Myers ltr to CMC, dtd 28Feb53.

²⁷ 106th Inf UJnl, msgs dtd 1837 and 1945, 19Feb44.

³⁰ *Anderson ltr.* Colonel Anderson felt that the night attack had been launched as part of a "race" between the 106th Infantry and 22d Marines. But there are at least two views of every military decision. Colonel Ayers' executive officer pointed out that the night attack was intended to keep pressure on the Japanese and to give the enemy no "respite in which to reorganize and counterattack in force (the invariable Japanese reaction in every previous

²⁸ 106th Inf UJnl, msg dtd 1850, 19Feb44 (WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

²⁷ Some of the information concerning the actions of 3/22 on the night of 19 February comes from an interview with LtCol Clair W. Shisler, extracts from which are printed in Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*, pp. 140-141. The present location of the transcript of this interview is not known.

from mopping up. Thus Hashida's remnants were able to enter the gap between battalions and, screened by the underbrush, deliver another blow. Thirty to 40 Japanese attacked Shisler's command post at about 0900 and for a time it looked as though its defenses would be shattered.

The enemy struck without warning and pressed his thrust with desperate fury. "In my opinion," wrote an eyewitness to the fight, "what would have been a complete rout for us was prevented by the initiative and resourcefulness of two men—Sergeant Major John L. Nagazyna and Captain Leighton Clark . . . who . . . got many men back on line by threatening, encouraging, cajoling, and dragging them back into position." Under this kind of leadership, the clerks, radiomen, and other specialists hurled back the Japanese. A detachment of riflemen, which arrived just as the enemy struck, helped stiffen the command post defenses. Marine losses in this furious action were 4 killed and 8 wounded among the command group. Since other units in the immediate vicinity also suffered casualties, the attackers may have killed as many as 10 Americans.³¹

Most of Hashida's troops now were fighting with their backs against Wide Passage. No longer was there any threat of a coordinated counterattack,

engagement)." In his opinion, had the attack not continued "the counterattack might well have been more effective," and that Colonel Ayers' "order was a logical application of available means (illumination and continued pressure) to counter a relatively certain Japanese reaction." Col Joseph J. Farley, AUS, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 20Oct62.

³¹ Young ltr, *op. cit.*

but the task of locating and killing these last stubborn defenders occupied most of the day. Again, self-propelled 105mm guns from the Army regiment proved their worth. By 1445, Marines and soldiers had overwhelmed this final pocket of resistance, and the southwestern end of the island was secured.

While 1/106 and 3/22 were fighting their way toward Wide Passage, Mizony's battalion was advancing toward the opposite end of the island. Like Cornett's unit, 3/106 attempted to continue its attack after darkness. The effort was soon frustrated, for "it was impossible to see the camouflaged holes, contact was poor, and the troops as a whole did not seem to have the confidence in themselves that was so apparent during the day."³² The soldiers, halted approximately one-quarter of the way to the narrower tip of the island, resumed their offensive after daybreak, and at dark were still short of their final objective. Not until the afternoon of 21 February was this portion of Eniwetok Island overrun.

During the fight for Eniwetok Island, the 4th Marine Division scout company and the VAC Reconnaissance Company continued operations elsewhere in the atoll. Among the islands seized was a coral outcropping just north of Parry, Japtan, which was occupied on 19 February. On the next day, the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion emplaced its 75mm weapons here to support the attack upon Parry. LILAC, between Parry and Japtan, also was occupied, and to the southwest across the lagoon, a party of scouts

³² 3/106 S-3 Sum (WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

killed nine Japanese on POSY (Rigili). By the afternoon of 21 February, only Parry remained in Japanese hands. (See Map 12.).

PARRY: THE LAST OBJECTIVE

General Watson had hoped that Eniwetok Island could be overrun quickly, but the assault force had become bogged down. In spite of the disappointing results of the first day's fighting, he alerted the components of the 22d Marines on Engebi to embark for an attack on Parry tentatively scheduled for 0900, 21 February. The two battalions reported for further orders on the afternoon of 20 February. The commanding general, however, decided to strike at Parry on 22 February, after reembarking 3/22 as landing force reserve.

By this time, the effect of the continuous series of landings was beginning to make itself felt. On the evening of 20 February, Watson estimated, on the basis of recent reports, that the 22d Marines had suffered 116 dead, 254 wounded, and 6 missing, and the 106th Infantry, 18 killed, 60 wounded, and 14 missing. Although the effectiveness of Tactical Group 1 remained "very satisfactory," the commanding general admitted "some reduction of combat efficiency."³³

To insure that the Parry landing force would be at peak combat efficiency, he attached to it the 2d Separate Tank Company, VAC Reconnaissance Company, and 4th Marine Division scout unit. He also alerted

the light tank company attached to the 106th Infantry to be available for action on the morning of the Parry assault. Mizony's 3/106 was designated as group reserve, available for employment upon 4-hours' notice. Finally, the 10th Marine Defense Battalion was ordered to organize five 100-man rifle companies for possible use at Parry.

Tactical Group 1 also was experiencing shortages in certain types of munitions. All transports were searched for any demolitions that might have been overlooked during the earlier operations. The shortage was relieved to some extent by an aerial shipment of 775 offensive grenades and 1,500 demolition caps that arrived from Kwajalein before noon of 22 February. General Watson also limited the amount of artillery ammunition to be fired in preparation for the Parry landing. The 105s and 75s were to expend no more than one and one-half units of fire during daylight of 21 February and no more than 2,400 rounds per battalion on the following night. In addition, the 22d Marines lacked the prescribed number of rifles and automatic rifles. Before the operation began, many Marines had discarded these weapons in favor of carbines, but the bullets fired from the lighter weapons lacked the killing power of rifle ammunition. "The BARmen and riflemen," recalled an officer of the 22d Marines, "seemed very happy to discard their carbines and take up their former weapons prior to the Parry landing."³⁴ Rifles and automatic rifles from other

³³ TG 1 URpt, 19-20Feb44, Encl G to TG 1 SAR.

³⁴ Scott ltr.

units were redistributed until the Marine infantry units had their full complement of weapons.

The resistance encountered at Engebi and Eniwetok Islands brought about two changes of plan. Admiral Hill had decided to increase the tonnage of naval shells fired into Parry's defensive installations. On 20 February, while Watson was conferring with his unit commanders, the battleships *Tennessee* and *Pennsylvania*, ships which had not figured in the original bombardment scheme, closed to within 850 yards of the objective to batter suspected defensive installations. On the following day, these vessels increased the range to deliver high trajectory fire, a type judged more effective against underground emplacements.

General Watson now re-examined the frontages assigned the assault battalions in his tentative plan. The landing beaches, designated Green 2 and Green 3, were separated in the original plan by a small pier that jutted 20 yards into the lagoon. Green 2 stretched from this structure northward to within a short distance of the fringing reef. Green 3 extended southward to another longer pier, a structure called Valentine Pier. Together the proposed assault beaches encompassed most of the northern third of the wooded island. The commanding general, deciding that the battalion frontages were too large, compressed the beachhead toward the north, so that the landing area, divided equally between the assault battalions, was flanked by the reef on one side and on the other by an arbitrary line 300

yards south of the shorter pier.³⁵ (See Map 13.)

At Z hour, finally fixed at 0900 on 22 February, Lieutenant Colonel Fromhold's 1/22 would land on Green 3, seize that portion of the island directly to its front, and then reorganize at a phase line just south of Valentine Pier before attacking southward to the narrow tail of the torpedo-shaped objective. On the left, Lieutenant Colonel Hart's 2/22 had the mission of striking across the island, passing into regimental reserve, and then mopping up the northern sector of Parry. Major Shisler's 3/22 was to follow 1/22 ashore and move into position to the right of Fromhold's battalion on the 0-1 Line for the 2-battalion advance southward, with the units separated by a line drawn down center of the long axis of the island.

Tallying the number of casualties, designating reserve units, distributing weapons and ammunition, and revising tactical plans, all of them difficult tasks, were accomplished rapidly. Colonel Walker, commanding officer of the 22d Marines, at 2100 reported: "Assault battalions are embarked on LSTs; all preparations complete."³⁶ Meanwhile, the 104th Field Artillery on Eniwetok Island and the 2d Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion on Japtan joined four destroyers in a night harassment of Parry. On the following morning, Walker's men would storm

³⁵ *Fromhold interview*. The account of this change of plans contained in Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*, p. 144, is based in part on an interview with Col Floyd R. Moore, dtd 1 Mar 53. Apparently, no notes of this conversation have been retained.

³⁶ *TG 1 Jnl*, msg no. 25, 21-23 Feb 44.

the last enemy bastion in the entire atoll.

Like their comrades elsewhere in the atoll, the members of the Parry garrison were determined to resist to the last man. On the morning of 18 February, the Japanese, though suffering from the effects of reduced rations, bombing, and naval gunfire, were ready for the impending battle. "We thought they would land this morning," wrote one of Parry's defenders in his diary, "but there was only a continuation of their bombardment and no landing. As this was contrary to our expectations, we were rather disappointed." On the following day, Hill's old battleships began hammering the island, driving the Japanese into underground shelters which soon became "unendurably hot." This same Japanese soldier had glanced over the waters of the lagoon and seen "boats . . . entering and leaving . . . at will, making fools out of us." Now as death drew near, he consoled himself with the thought that "When they land, we will pay them back for what they have given us. . . ." ³⁷

Determined as most of them were, the enemy troops on Parry staggered under the blows of American warships, planes, and howitzer batteries. Fire-support ships slammed 143 16-inch, 751 14-inch, 896 8-inch, and 9,950 5-inch shells into an area of 200 acres. Although the battleships had fired more rounds at Engebi, smaller ships more than made up the difference, so that Parry Island rocked under the heaviest weight of metal delivered during the Eniwetok campaign.

³⁷ JICPOA Item 7005.

On 22 February, both artillery battalions began an intense bombardment at 0600, to be joined an hour later by supporting warships. Clouds of dust and smoke rose from the battered island and began rolling out over the lagoon. By 0845, when the first wave crossed the line of departure, the line of lighted buoys that marked the boundary between beaches was no longer visible, nor could the LVT drivers make out many landmarks along the lagoon coast. A "terrific set" in the current off the beaches,³⁸ combined with poor visibility and the fact that not all control officers were aware of the recent revision in plans, insured a confused landing.

During the ship-to-shore movement, three LCI(G)s, supporting the tractors on the right flank, were hit by 5-inch shells from destroyers, which were firing by radar because of the smoke.³⁹ Moments later, an observation plane dived too low, was struck by shells fired toward Parry, and crashed in flames. In spite of these accidents, the assault battalions landed at 0900, but not on their assigned beaches. Both units were some 300 yards south of where they should have been.

On the left, 2/22 landed out of position, but the unit met light resistance along the beach. The heaviest fire came from the vicinity of Valentine Pier in the zone of 1/22. Some of Hart's Marines, however, were killed by enemy mines, and others lost their lives trying to eliminate individual Japanese who fought viciously from foxholes inland of Green 2.

³⁸ Hill interview/comments Marshalls.

³⁹ Ibid.



MARINE HEAVY MACHINE GUNS fire at Japanese defenses 400 yards ahead on the beach at Eniwetok Island. (USN 80-G-216019)



NAVY CORPSMEN administer blood plasma to a wounded Marine on the beach at Eniwetok Island. (USN 216030)

During the day's fighting at the northern end of the island, bulldozers were used to bury many Japanese in their underground spider holes. Army light tanks landed at 1100 to support the Marines, and two 55-man detachments from VAC Reconnaissance Company also took part in the fighting. By 1400, Hart's men had secured their portion of the objective, but mopping up was not yet completed.⁴⁰ On the adjacent beach, 1/22 faced sterner resistance.

On the right flank, the first wave of Fromhold's battalion landed just south of Valentine Pier, one of the few landmarks visible to the tractor crews. The next wave went ashore 200 yards north of that pier, and the third touched down between the first two. As Marine officers and noncommissioned officers attempted to sort out the intermingled units and lead the men inland, the Japanese cut loose with machine guns and mortars.

Because of the confusion and the devastation caused by the preliminary bombardment, Fromhold was unable to check his exact position. Yet, he had no reason to doubt that the tractors had landed his battalion in the proper place so he proceeded to execute the attack as planned. Hand-to-hand fighting raged along the shoreline, as the Marines wiped out the Japanese who manned the beach defenses. The fighting centered around a sand dune separated from the water by a narrow strip of coral. Interlocking bands of machine gun fire grazed the face of the dune to cut down any Marines who sought its protection. Once the auto-

matic weapons had been located and destroyed, 1/22 was able to advance inland. The battalion commander described his losses as "fairly heavy."⁴¹

While the bulk of 1/22 was engaged in its fight for the beaches, assault elements of two companies somehow shouldered their way through the melee to thrust across the island. These Marines reached the ocean shore by 1000 and established a defensive perimeter.⁴² In the meantime, the remainder of the battalion had cleared the enemy from the immediate vicinity of Green 3. Supported by Marine medium tanks that had just landed, Fromhold's command plunged forward.

Just inland of the dune, General Nishida had prepared another unpleasant surprise for the advancing Marines. He had emplaced three of his light tanks in this area. Although the vehicles were hidden in pits, he had no intention of using them as improvised pillboxes. Ramps enabled the armor to crawl from their protected positions and thunder down on the beachhead. Fortunately for the Americans, the enemy delayed his tank attack until elements of the 2d Separate Tank Company were ashore. "If they had attacked the infantry before tank support arrived," commented one of Fromhold's officers, "the battle for Parry Island would have been very bloody, indeed."⁴³

⁴¹ *Fromhold interview.*

⁴² LtCol Charles F. Widdecke ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar53.

⁴³ *Scott ltr.* The battalion commander later pointed out that his unit antitank weapons, 37mm cannon and 2.36-inch rocket launchers, had been ineffective during CATCHPOLE, but he did believe that the rocket launcher could

⁴⁰ *Reinhardt ltr.*

Even though Shermans were at hand to destroy the lighter vehicles with 75mm shells, the fight was far from easy. Deadly fire from enemy cannon emplaced on the right flank raked the battalion, so Fromhold requested the aid of naval gunfire. In doing so, he located the Japanese weapons in relation to where 1/22 should have been, rather than where the unit actually was. The only landmark that the battalion commander had recognized so far was the shattered pier near which he had landed. He had no way of knowing that this was Valentine Pier instead of the shorter structure that lay, also in ruins, farther to the north. Advised by aerial observers of the actual progress of the battalion, higher headquarters rejected his request, but a shore fire control party managed to get through to the supporting warships, and soon American shells began screaming toward the supposed location of the enemy guns.

The first of five salvos struck just as the Marine armor was finishing off the enemy light tanks. Some of the Shermans were hit, one by two shells, yet only one crewman was killed and three wounded. The rounds also fell among the infantry, but these Marines suffered fewer than 10 casualties. The misdirected concentration of naval gunfire took a far heavier toll of Japanese men and equipment. "Our troops were stunned and shocked momentarily," Fromhold has admitted, "but so were the Japs."⁴⁴

be developed into an important implement of war. 1/22 Suggestions for Future Atoll Ops Based on CbtExpc on Engebi and Parry Islands, Eniwetok Island, n.d.

⁴⁴ *Fromhold interview.*

The Marines recovered more quickly than their adversaries and by noon had reached the ocean coast. As the battalion was reorganizing after its advance across the island, a group of 150–200 Japanese were seen marching northward in single file along the shoreline. These defenders may have taken refuge on the reef during the preliminary bombardment and were just now entering the fight. Although the enemy troops carried rifles, carbines, and automatic rifles, they had little chance to use them. As the Marine battalion commander phrased it: "The Japs were caught like rats in a trap and exterminated."⁴⁵ Once its zone of action had been secured, 1/22 was ready for the drive southward, an offensive that would begin when 3/22 relieved that portion of Fromhold's command which was holding the right flank of the beachhead.

The 3d Battalion had been scheduled to land behind 1/22 on Beach Green 3, but because Fromhold's men had landed out of position, the unit was diverted to the extreme left flank of Green 2. Shisler's men landed at 1000, opposed by Japanese small-arms fire, mortar concentrations, and by mines scattered along the shore. Within an hour, 3/22 had advanced southward, neutralizing en route bypassed Japanese defenses, to reach its assigned position along the right half of the 0–1 Line. Colonel Walker, followed by his regimental command post group, landed during the morning. By 1300, General Watson had committed VAC Reconnaissance Company to assist 2/22 and the scout company to aid

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

1/22 in mopping up the captured portion of the island.

During the afternoon, 1/22 on the left and 3/22 on the right were to thrust toward the southern tip of the island, an attack that would be supported by the 2d Separate Tank Company. After a 15-minute artillery bombardment, the Marines started forward at 1330. The defenders fought as viciously as ever, resisting to the death from spider webs and other concealed positions, but close cooperation among armor, infantry, and artillery enabled the attackers to push steadily forward.

Medium tanks neutralized enemy strongpoints with 75mm weapons and machine guns, while the assault teams darted close enough to employ demolitions or flamethrowers. When the armored vehicles had expended their ammunition, they retired a short distance to replenish their magazines. During the interim, a 60mm mortar barrage was called down close to the forward infantry units, while 75mm howitzers pounded the area just beyond that covered by the mortars. Screened by this fire, half-tracks evacuated the wounded and DUKWs delivered supplies to the rifle companies. When the tanks were ready, the advance resumed.⁴⁶

By nightfall, the two battalions were approximately 450 yards from the southern end of the island. Since operations during darkness on so narrow a front might result in firefights between friendly units, the Marines halted for the night. Although an un-

known number of Japanese had survived the day's fighting, Colonel Walker was confident that the battle had been won. At 1930 he announced that Parry was secured.

Marine losses during the night of 22-23 February were few. The enemy sniped continually at the Marines, but illumination provided by the supporting warships deprived the enemy of any moral advantage. Abandoned weapons and ammunition had been carefully collected by the units assigned to mop up the island, so the infiltrators had no ready-made "arsenal" such as they had enjoyed at Engebi. Also, the fire discipline of the regiment had improved once the men became used to night combat.

All that remained for 23 February was the elimination of the defenders trapped at the point of the island. Elements of 3/22 and 1/22 overran the remaining territory by 0900, but some mopping up remained. This task was undertaken by 3/106. On 25 February, the 22d Marines and its attached units sailed from the atoll, leaving behind Colonel Ayers' troops as part of the Eniwetok garrison. Tactical Group 1 was disbanded on 22 March.

CATCHPOLE had proved a complete success. The 22d Marines had been exhausted from its "repeated landing operations," but the "loss in combat efficiency due to fatigue and casualties was compensated for by the outstanding fighting spirit of all hands."⁴⁷ Marine casualties during the entire operation were reported as 254 killed and

⁴⁶ *Scott ltr.*

⁴⁷ TG 1 URpt, 22-23Feb44, Encl G to TG 1 SAR.

555 wounded.⁴⁸ The 106th Infantry, which lost 94 killed and 311 wounded, proved equal to its first test of combat despite the handicaps under which it operated. Perhaps the best indication of the viciousness of the fighting is that only 66 of the enemy surrendered.

Inadequate rehearsals, General Watson maintained, caused most of the difficulties encountered by the 106th Infantry. At Eniwetok Island, he continued, "the assault troops did not move forward rapidly from the beaches . . . did not operate in close cooperation with tanks, and failed to realize the capabilities of and to use to the fullest extent naval gunfire and close support aviation."⁴⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Colonel Joseph C. Anderson, USA, of the VAC planning staff. "The comments of General Watson relative to the training of troops for this operation are certainly valid," the Army officer has commented, "as the execution by the 106th Infantry (less 2d Battalion) so clearly demonstrated."⁵⁰

The Eniwetok victory brought American forces to within 1,100 miles of the Marianas. An objective tentatively scheduled for May was secured almost three months ahead of time. In addition, a related operation had showed Truk to be far less formidable than anticipated. Now Admiral Nimitz could devote his energies to preparing for a blow against the Marianas while consolidating his grip on the Marshalls.

⁴⁸ Final official Marine casualty totals for the Eniwetok Operation are listed in Appendix H.

⁴⁹ *TG 1 SplRpt*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Anderson ltr.*

FLINTLOCK, JUNIOR ⁵¹

The 22d Marines returned to Kwajalein Atoll on 26 February to begin relieving the 25th Marines as the garrison force. The Eniwetok veterans manned defensive positions on several different islands. In the north, 2/22 went ashore on Roi-Namur, 3/22 on ANTON (Edgigen), regimental headquarters and some support units on ALLEN, and the remaining support units on ANDREW. To the south, 1/22 assumed responsibility for BENNETT. If Colonel Walker's troops anticipated a lengthy period of rest, they were mistaken, for Rear Admiral Alva D. Bernhard, the atoll commander, had received orders to neutralize those of the Marshall Islands which were undefended or lightly held.

Admiral Bernhard was charged with a four-part task. Under his direction, the garrison force was to: destroy Japanese installations or materials which might aid enemy air, surface, or submarine forces; capture Japanese or natives sympathetic to the enemy

⁵¹ Additional sources for the following sections include: Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Ailuk, Mejit, Jemo, and Likiep, dtd 12Apr44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Bikini, Ailinginae, Rongelap, Rongerik, Utirik, Bikar, and Taka, n.d.; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Lib, dtd 28Mar44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Wotho, Ujae, and Lae, dtd 28Mar44; Atoll Cdr, Rpt of Occ of Ailinglapalap and Namu, n.d.; 22d Mar Rpt of Ops into Lesser Marshalls, dtd 6Apr44; 22d Mar, Atoll Hopping: the lesser Marshalls, n.d.; TU 57.10.9 Rpt of Recon of Ailinglapalap, Kili, Ebon, and Namorik, dtd 30Mar44; 2/22 Lesser Marshalls Ops, n.d.; 3/22 Rpt of Ops against Ailinglapalap, Ebon, Namorik, and Kili, dtd 29Mar44; Civil Affairs Rpt of Recon of Ebon, Namorik, and Kili, dtd 6Apr44; Sherrod, *Marine Air History*.

cause; inform the islanders that American forces were in control of the region; and, establish friendly relations with the natives by assisting them as much as practicable. The admiral and Colonel Walker formed a joint staff to plan and direct the series of landings.

Operation FLINTLOCK, JR., dealt with five areas. Included in the West Group were Wotho, Ujae, and Lae Atolls. The South Group embraced Namu, Ailinglapalap, Namorik, and Ebon Atolls, as well as Kili Island. Bikini, Rongelap, Ailinginae, and Rongerik Atolls formed the North Group, while Bikar, Utirik, Taka, Ailuk, and Likiep Atolls and Jemo and Mejit Islands were assigned to the Northeast Group. Lib Island, due south of Kwajalein Atoll, was designated as a separate area. Before any landing was made, a patrol plane would take photographs of the particular objective. If the defenses did appear weak, Admiral Bernhard could then dispatch a force adequate to the task. A typical expedition might consist of two or more companies from Colonel Walker's 22d Marines, an LST carrying as many as nine LVTs, two LCIs, a destroyer or destroyer escort, and a minesweeper. Marine scout bombers based at Roi had the mission of providing air support for the landings. To each of the forces that he dispatched, the admiral assigned civil affairs and medical specialists as well as interpreters and native guides. (See Map 7.)

FLINTLOCK, JR. began on 8 March, when two reinforced rifle companies from 1/22 arrived off Wotho Atoll. Major Crawford B. Lawton, in command of the force, learned from

natives that only 12 Japanese, survivors of a plane crash, were present. The Marines landed unopposed on the following morning, suffered one casualty from the accidental explosion of a grenade, and cornered the enemy fliers, who committed suicide rather than surrender. Five of the six Japanese weather observers at Ujae Atoll, where the Marines landed on the 10th, killed themselves, but one man elected to become a prisoner of war.

During the securing of Wotho and Ujae, the natives had been friendly, but such was not the case at Lae Atoll. For some time the inhabitants of this third objective remained aloof, though they were not hostile. A short time before the Americans arrived, a box containing a hand grenade had drifted ashore. When the grenade exploded, a child was injured, and the natives for a time blamed the Marines, who had the misfortune of landing while memories of the tragedy were fresh.⁵²

On 14 March, the conquest of the West Group by now completed, Lawton's men returned to Kwajalein. While they were absent, Colonel Walker had been reassigned to VAC headquarters. His successor as regimental commander was his executive officer, Colonel Merlin F. Schneider. During this period, on 11 March, a reinforced platoon from the 1st Battalion had raised the American flag on Lib Island, which was not occupied by the enemy.

Operations against the South Group,

⁵² This story of the Lae occupation was based on comments by LtCol Crawford B. Lawton, n.d., in Heinl and Crown, *The Marshalls*, p. 154. No record of his remarks has been discovered.

delayed when one of the landing craft began shipping water, finally got underway on 19 March. On that day, two separate forces, some 650 Marines in all, set sail from Kwajalein for Ailinglapalap Atoll. On the morning of 21 March, Major William E. Sperling, III landed his portion of 3/22, to be followed ashore by the group commanded by Major Shisler. The defenders of the atoll manned a defensive line that crossed Ailinglapalap Island at its narrowest point. Marine infantrymen attacked behind an 81mm mortar barrage to crush the position. Two Marines were wounded on Ailinglapalap Island and 39 Japanese killed. Two of the defenders escaped the American onslaught, but both were captured elsewhere in the atoll.

Once this objective was secured, the two forces parted company as planned. Shisler's men landed at Ebon Atoll on the morning of 23 March and, on the following day, killed 17 Japanese in a vicious fight that cost the lives of two Marines. Six enemy noncombatants were taken into custody. From Ebon, Shisler's command proceeded to Namorik Atoll and Kili Island, neither of which had been garrisoned. Meanwhile, Sperling's Marines investigated Namu Atoll, where seven Japanese civilians willingly surrendered.

On 30 March, two days after Shisler returned to Kwajalein, Major Earl J. Cook led a reinforced rifle company toward the Northeast Group. Once again, the troops were provided by 3/22. The number of objectives was reduced to three—Mejit, Ailuk, and Likiep—for aerial photographs and reports by friendly natives indicated that these were the only inhabited places in

the area. No Japanese were found at either Ailuk or Likiep Atoll, but every member of the six-man weather station on Mejit died resisting the landing.

While 3/22 was carrying out its assignments, the 2d Battalion dispatched a reinforced rifle company to secure the North Group and as much of the Northeast Group as remained under enemy control. Aerial reconnaissance indicated that Ailinginae, Rongerik, and Bikar Atolls were not inhabited, so Major Robert P. Felker, the force commander, was free to concentrate upon Bikini, Rongelap, and Utirik Atolls.

Felker's Marines landed on 28 March at Bikini, but no fighting occurred, for the five Japanese on the atoll killed themselves. The 6-man detachment reported at Rongelap apparently had been withdrawn; at any rate, the Americans found no trace of it. On 5 April, the company landed at Utirik, killed 14 Japanese, and then re-embarked for Kwajalein.

During FLINTLOCK, JR. elements of the 22d Marines had made 29 separate landings in order to secure 12 atolls and 3 islands. This campaign, which lasted from 7 March to 5 April, brought an estimated 60,000 square miles of ocean under American control. Once the mission had been accomplished, the 22d Marines embarked for Guadalcanal to prepare for further operations.

FINAL OPERATIONS

The final landings of the Marshalls campaign took place shortly after the departure of the 22d Marines. On 17 April, a detachment from the 1st Marine Defense Battalion set sail for

Erikub Atoll, some 5 miles from Wotje, and Aur Atoll, located 10 miles from Maloelap. No Japanese were found at either objective and the nearby enemy garrisons did not attempt to interfere. In February, Marines from this battalion had left their camp at Majuro to occupy Arno Atoll east of Majuro and north of the Japanese stronghold of Mille. Soldiers from the 111th Infantry landed at Ujelang Atoll on 21 April to begin a 2-day reconnaissance that resulted in the killing of 18 Japanese. No further landings would be made until hostilities had ended.

By the end of April, the enemy retained control over only Wotje, Mille, Maloelap, and Jaluit Atolls in The Marshalls group. The task of keeping these bases neutralized fell to the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing, later redesignated the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. In February, Marine fighters arrived at Roi and Engebi, but the systematic battering of the bypassed atolls did not begin until 4 March, when scout bombers from Majuro braved dense antiaircraft fire to attack Jaluit.

By the time of this first Marine raid, Navy and Army aviators had destroyed the enemy aircraft assigned to defend the Marshalls. The only aerial opposition encountered by these Marine pilots occurred during a strike launched on 28 March against Ponape in the Carolines. Six F4U (Corsair) fighters, escorting four Army bombers, shot down eight Japanese fighters and destroyed another on the ground. Although

Ponape was visited several times during the months that followed, no Japanese planes attempted to intercept the raiders.

From 4 March 1944 until the end of hostilities in August of the following year, the Marines continued to bomb and strafe Mille, Maloelap, Wotje, and Jaluit. They unleashed 6,920 tons of bombs and rockets, approximately half the total tonnage employed against the four atolls during the entire war. These missiles, along with 2,340 tons of naval shells, killed 2,564 Japanese out of garrisons that totalled over 13,000. In carrying out their part of the Marshalls mop-up, Marine airmen learned lessons in fighter-bomber techniques applicable elsewhere in the Pacific.⁵³

The FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE operations resulted in the rapid capture of bases for further Pacific operations. During FLINTLOCK, JR. and the landings that followed, American control over the Marshalls was confirmed. Then, while the assault troops advanced into the Marianas, Marine aviators assumed the mission of maintaining the neutralization of the bypassed strongholds in the group. So well did the flyers succeed that those Japanese who survived the rain of bombs and rockets either starved to death or became so weak from hunger that they were no longer even a remote threat to American forces.

⁵³ A more complete treatment of the activities of Marine aviation in the Marshalls will be contained in the fourth volume of this series.

The Fruits of Victory

The conquest of the Marshalls was a far more significant victory than the previous success in the Gilberts. FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE represented a shattering of the line of outposts that protected the inner defenses of the enemy homeland. As far as the Japanese were concerned, the Marshalls themselves were not indispensable, but the speed with which the American forces moved robbed the enemy of the time he needed to prepare for the defense of the more vital islands that lay nearer to Japan.

THE ENEMY SITUATION¹

Among the victims of FLINTLOCK was the Japanese naval base at Truk. On 10 February, immediately after the loss of key islands in Kwajalein Atoll, the enemy decided to withdraw his major fleet units to prevent their destruction by American air power. The carrier raid that preceded CATCHPOLE made Truk a rattlesnake without fangs. Nimitz concluded that no amphibious assault would be necessary and abandoned a plan that called for the employment of five divisions and one additional regiment. Once Truk

had joined Rabaul and Kavieng in the backwash of World War II, the 1st, 3d, and 4th Marine Divisions, the 4th Marines, and the 7th and 77th Infantry Divisions were freed for service elsewhere in the Pacific. American planners could now look forward to the Marianas.

The loss of the Marshalls and the resultant neutralization of Truk caused the enemy to revise his strategy. Early in March, Admiral Mineichi Koga, commander in chief of the Japanese *Combined Fleet*, established still another zone in which interception operations could be carried out against the American fleet. Patrol planes, submarines, and picket boats were charged with detecting any attempt by Nimitz to penetrate the Central Pacific Front, an area stretching from the Kuriles past Honshu, through the Bonins, Marianas, and Carolines, and terminating in New Guinea. Should the United States fleet venture into the area, land-based planes would blast the carriers to enable surface ships to close with and sink the troop transports. The Japanese admiral urged his men to destroy as many of the invaders as possible while the expedition was at sea. The survivors, in keeping with current tactical doctrine, were to be annihilated at the beaches. This was the gist of Koga's proposed *Z Operation*.

Admiral Koga was killed in a plane crash before his plan could be executed,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: Hattori, *Complete History*, v. 3, p. 5; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; USSBS, *Campaigns of the Pacific War*.

but his successor in command of the *Combined Fleet*, Admiral Soemu Toyoda, had ample time to modify this basic strategy before the Americans struck. This revised plan, dubbed A-GO, also called for strengthening the island defenses along the Central Pacific Front. Toyoda, however, established two "decisive battle areas," the Palau Islands and the western Carolines. If amphibious forces should attempt to seize outposts in either the western Carolines, the neighboring Marianas, or the Palaus, the defense forces already posted in the threatened sector were to hold fast. The bulk of the Imperial fleet, now based at Tawi Tawi off Borneo, would stream northeastward to crush the Americans.

CATCHPOLE, following so closely after FLINTLOCK, made it inevitable that Japan would have extreme difficulty in completing the preparations necessary for A-GO. The decision to bypass Truk left Nimitz with enough well-trained troops, many of them combat veterans, to deliver a sudden blow at the Marianas. The enemy wanted to reinforce these islands before they were attacked, but in order to move the necessary men and their supplies, the Japanese had to place a heavy strain on an already weakened merchant marine. By the beginning of March 1944, the available enemy merchant shipping, almost 6½ million tons at the outbreak of the war, had been reduced to about 4 million. American submarines had wrought most of this destruction. Now, thanks to the Marshalls operations, these undersea raiders would be able to operate from a base 1,200 miles closer to the Marianas.

AMERICAN GAINS

This second part of the Central Pacific campaign had come to a close with the capture of bases some 800 miles within enemy territory. The Japanese had been driven back to their inner defenses. American amphibious forces demonstrated beyond question that they had absorbed the lessons offered by the assault upon Betio.

Besides securing bases from which to mount further operations, the Pacific Fleet, by seizing certain key objectives, had succeeded in neutralizing the more powerful Japanese bastions in and near the Marshalls. The "unsinkable aircraft carriers," in which the enemy had placed so much confidence, remained ready to receive planes, but none could be sent them. American carrier task forces had driven the Japanese from the skies over the Marshalls, and land-based planes from the recently captured atolls stood ready to maintain this mastery of the air. The careful selection of targets coupled with a skillful use of the available air, ground, and sea forces meant a saving in lives as well as time.

In addition to these strategic gains, the Americans amassed additional experience in atoll warfare. Although the Marshalls operations represented some improvements in tactics and techniques over previous efforts, planners as well as troop leaders were well aware of errors that thus far escaped correction. Only by coldly assessing the campaigns just completed, noting weaknesses, and making the necessary corrections could Nimitz' amphibious forces lay the groundwork for future victories.

LESSONS LEARNED²

Like the Gilberts expeditionary force, the organizations formed for FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE did not include replacement pools. Planners had decided that casualties in the brief but intense Marshalls actions would not be severe enough to impair the effectiveness of the landing forces. At Kwajalein Atoll, no serious difficulties were encountered by the assault divisions, but the Roi garrison had to call for an emergency draft of 27 men to replace casualties suffered during the 12 February Japanese air raid. At Eniwetok, however, a series of relatively brief fights gradually wore down Tactical Group 1 to such an extent that General Watson ordered rifle units formed from among elements of his garrison forces.

The staff of Tactical Group 1 had been hard pressed to keep an accurate tally of casualties. What was needed, General Watson decided, was a single center for compiling such data, a clearing house that would be located in the flagship of the attack force commander. VAC pointed out that directives then in force called for just such a system of accounting. The fault lay in the various commanders, who seldom reported accurately or on time.

American intelligence concerning Kwajalein Atoll was accurate, but Gen-

eral Smith's staff desired more extensive coverage by oblique aerial photographs and wanted the pictures delivered at least 90 days prior to D-Day. General Watson, whose Parry Island assault troops had been confused by a redesignation of the beaches, noted that the arbitrary designation of "color" beaches by higher headquarters was not always advisable. He believed that the attack force commander should have additional leeway in designating the area to be stormed. Looking back on the Eniwetok operation, Watson also called for the marking of known defenses on maps as small in scale as 1:20,000, a more careful delineation of the coastline and of all landmarks upon which the tractor waves might guide, and photographic coverage of every island within the atoll to be attacked. JICPOA had done an accurate job in placing the bulk of the *1st Amphibious Brigade* at Eniwetok Atoll, but photographs taken prior to D-Day did not indicate the type of defenses that the enemy had prepared. By the time of the main landings, General Watson was aware of the enemy's strength and probable dispositions. The extent of the Japanese underground defenses, however, was not known until the Americans actually encountered them.

Neither of the Marshalls operations represented any departure from the established command structure for amphibious operations. Although the position of the corps commander was clarified for the Kwajalein landings, the nature of the undertaking prevented General Smith from exercising close tactical supervision. Essentially, FLINTLOCK consisted of two distinct series of

² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *TF 51 AR*; *TF 53 AR Roi-Namur*; *VAC AR FLINTLOCK* (including rpts of staff sections, Encls C-H); *VAC Rpt of LogAspects*; *VAC Cmts on TG 1 SAR*, dtd 1Apr44; *TG 51.11 OpRpt*; *4th Mar Div AR*; *TG 1 SAR*; *ComInCh, Marshall Islands*; *Sherrod, Marine Air History*.



RIFLEMEN of the 22d Marines advance toward the last Japanese-held area on Parry.
(USMC 74488)



MARIANAS INVASION FORCE assembled in the lagoon at Eniwetok Atoll on 9 June 1944. (USN 80-G-248207)

landings by widely separated divisions. Admiral Turner, however, later noted that "all Central Pacific amphibious operations in which I was concerned needed at least a corps command of expeditionary troops."³ The principle, then, was already accepted. As soon as VAC attacked a suitable land mass, its commanding general would direct more closely the actions of its assigned divisions.

As far as planning was concerned, the staffs of both VAC and Tactical Group 1 voiced the same complaint—not enough time. Indeed, every agency involved in the planning of FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE was working against a rapidly approaching deadline. For this reason, final versions of certain annexes of the basic plans were late in reaching the assault units. The most conspicuous victims of this situation were the LVT and LVT(A) battalions, which had not received their orders for the Roi-Namur landings in time for rehearsals. In particular, this fact hampered their communications, since radio frequencies had to be set en route to the line of departure.⁴

If nothing else, the Marshalls fighting proved the value of sound training climaxed by realistic rehearsals. The shortcomings of Marine amphibian tractor crews at Roi-Namur and of Army infantrymen on Eniwetok Island were blamed on a lack of indoctrination and practice. VAC head-

quarters could account for the poor quality of the amphibious rehearsals staged for Tactical Group 1. Watson's command completed its training while the FLINTLOCK expedition was being mounted, so the assault units rather than the reserve had first call for the limited number of DUKWs and LVTs then available. The 10th Amphibian Tractor Battalion had completed its final exercise before the plan of attack was ready for distribution. As General Smith went on to point out, there would be times when speed was so essential that rehearsals were certain to be inadequate.

In the case of the Marshalls operations, speed denied the enemy time to convert the objectives into fortresses as powerful as Betio Island had been. Firepower helped the American landing forces to succeed in spite of the minor defects in their training and employment. The prolonged naval bombardment of targets in Kwajalein Atoll was supplemented by the effective fires of artillery units emplaced on islands off the principal objectives. The quality of naval gunfire, and of air support as well, had improved since GALVANIC. General Schmidt, for example, estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of the Roi-Namur garrison was killed by either naval shelling or aerial attack. At Eniwetok Atoll, neither planes nor warships were as deadly, for the planned bombardment was based on an incomplete knowledge of the nature of the Japanese defenses. The troops fighting ashore at Eniwetok, however, benefited from the first heavy use of night illumination shells by supporting naval vessels.

The landings, screened by the fires of

³ Turner ltr I.

⁴ The radio frequencies received in the plan could not be set up within the LSTs, consequently units had to struggle to establish them once they were launched for the landings. Metzger ltr.

LVT(A)s, LCI gunboats, and warships, were hampered by poor communications. In Kwajalein Atoll, where the sea was rough, many of the radios carried in LVTs were drowned out by spray, thus insuring a confused advance toward the beaches. Once again, Marine officers renewed their appeal for communications equipment that was adequately waterproofed.

Ashore the Marine troops fought well. What mistakes they did make were those expected of men entering combat for the first time. The unauthorized sprint across Roi, for example, upset the prearranged scheme of maneuver, although it undoubtedly kept the enemy off balance. This advance was traceable to the Marines' desire to excel in their first battle. Although the 22d Marines had trained ceaselessly during its stay in Samoa, this unit, too, needed the experience of actual warfare. During CATCHPOLE, unnecessary firing decreased in volume as the troops became used to fighting at night. In addition, the men of the regiment learned to avoid leaving weapons scattered about the battlefield where Japanese infiltrators could find them. In attacking enemy emplacements, whether concrete bunkers or underground spider webs, flamethrowers, demolitions, and hand grenades proved most deadly. The division of rifle squads into fire teams, as practiced by the 22d Marines, was a successful innovation, for these elements were especially effective in dealing with enemy positions that were located in wooded or overgrown areas.

Most aspects of the logistical plans for FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE represented improvements over GAL-

VANIC. The DUKW justified the confidence that General Corlett had placed in it, and the "hot cargo" system, as practiced by the 7th Infantry Division, proved a reliable method of getting priority cargo ashore during the early hours of an amphibious operation. Generals Schmidt and Watson also had critical items of supply preloaded in amphibious vehicles, in their case LVTs, ready to be landed at the request of the units ashore. Corps observers were convinced that the amphibian truck was better suited for carrying supplies than the tractor, for the DUKW had a larger cargo compartment and was easier to repair.

During the Marshalls fighting, the LST performed several important duties. Except for those units which seized the islands adjacent to Roi-Namur, all the Marine assault forces boarded their assigned tractors before the LVTs were launched by their parent landing ships. Thus, the troops were spared the ordeal of transferring in the open sea. Besides carrying LVTs and providing enclosed transfer areas, this same type of ship participated in the logistical plan. Certain LSTs carried food, water, and ammunition, others served as hospital wards, and still others carried tools and spare parts with which to repair damaged tractors.

The amount of supplies carried to Kwajalein Atoll proved, in some instances, more than sufficient, but the troops at Eniwetok Atoll endured shortages in concussion grenades and demolitions fuzes. Fortunately, the men had enough ammunition. One item that was habitually discarded as soon as the troops landed was the gas

mask, which General Watson considered a "distinct nuisance."⁵

The limited area available prevented the proper dispersal of supply dumps, but otherwise the movement of cargo to the troops inland was well executed. Pallets permitted the rapid landing of bulk cargo, and a permanent beach party organization assumed responsibility for controlling boat traffic and the evacuation of the wounded. After observing these beach parties in operation, Admiral Turner's headquarters recommended that a permanent shore party similar to that used in the Southwest Pacific be organized. A well-trained nucleus could be reinforced as necessary by labor contingents and garrison units, so that the handling of supplies no longer would depend on men borrowed from the assault battalions.

The role of Marine aviation in the Marshalls was little changed from the previous operation, for General Smith's recommendation that Marine pilots based on carriers support future landings had not been accepted. The performance of Navy airmen, however, was improved, thanks to better planning and careful briefing. During FLINTLOCK, aircraft had attacked in conjunction with the preliminary naval bombardment. Since the experiment had proved successful, VAC recommended that similar aerial attacks be carried out in forthcoming landings. General Watson's command had not benefited from this kind of coordination. Rather than suspend naval gunfire to enable the planes to make a final strafing run, he urged that this

last-minute strike be omitted in future landings.

Immediately after the capture of bases in Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls, Marine fighter planes arrived to help defend these conquests. Between 15 and 23 February, elements of two Marine fighter squadrons (VMFs-224 and -532) began flying combat air patrols from Kwajalein. VMF(N)-532, using radar-equipped F4Us, was responsible for patrolling the night skies. Although ground crews landed on Engebi while that island was being mopped up, Marine fighter craft did not make their appearance there until 27 February. VMF-113 operated during daylight, and a detachment from VMF(N)-532 took over after dark. On 14 April, the Engebi-based night fighters made their first kills of the war, destroying two Japanese planes and probably shooting down a third.

During the critical hours after the landings, the antiaircraft units from defense battalions were employed to protect the beachheads. Scout bombers also assisted indirectly in the aerial defense of the Marshalls bases by helping neutralize the bypassed atolls. In short, Marine aviators played a slightly larger role in FLINTLOCK and CATCHPOLE than they had in GALVANIC, but support of the landings remained the responsibility of the Navy. In addition, naval aviators operating from carriers prevented the Japanese from launching aerial attacks against the expanding beachhead, a task which they shared with Marine and Army antiaircraft units.

In summing up the FLINTLOCK operation, General Smith noted that the lessons learned in the Gilberts had

⁵ *TG 1 SplRpt*, p. 15.

proved invaluable. "In the attack of coral atolls," read his report, "very few recommendations can be made to improve upon the basic techniques previously recommended and utilized in FLINTLOCK. However, there is still much to be desired to improve planning,

improve coordination of efforts, and prepare for the attack of more difficult objectives."⁶ As the Central Pacific drive moved westward, the enemy's island defenses seemed certain to improve.

⁶ VAC AR FLINTLOCK, p. 11.

PART IV

Saipan: The Decisive Battle

Background to FORAGER

STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL PLANS

While the Japanese bolstered their defenses along the Central Pacific Front, American strategists were con-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FifthFlt OPlan Cen 10-44, dtd 12May44 (with changes); TF 51 Rpt of PhibOps for the Capture of the Marianas Islands, dtd 25Aug44, hereafter *TF 51 OpRpt*; TF 56 OPlan 3-44, dtd 26Apr44 (with changes); TF 56 Rpt of FORAGER Op (with encls covering Planning, Ops, Intel, Log, Pers, and StfRpts), dtd 25Oct44, hereafter *TF 56 OpRpt*; TF 52 AtkO A11-44, dtd 21May44 (with changes); TG 52.2 Rpt of Saipan Op, dtd 23Aug44, hereafter *TG 52.2 OpRpt*; NTLF OPlan 3-44 (with changes), dtd 1May44; NTLF Rpt of Marianas Op, Phase I (Saipan) (with encls containing Op and AdminOs, Daily DispSums, Stf and SpecRpts), dtd 12Aug44, hereafter *NTLF OpRpt*; 27th InfDiv Rpt of Ops, Saipan (with Narrative, Rpts of StfSecs and of SuborUs), dtd 24Oct44, hereafter *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; CominCh, *Amphibious Operations: Invasion of the Marianas, June to August 1944* dtd 30Dec44, hereafter CominCh, *The Marianas*; Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Philip A. Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas—The War in the Pacific—U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, DA, 1960), hereafter Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Maj Carl W. Hoffman, *Saipan: The Beginning of the End* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1950), hereafter Hoffman, *Saipan*; Samuel Eliot Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas, March 1944–August 1944—History of U. S. Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VIII (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1953), hereafter Morison,

cluding their lengthy debate concerning the future course of the Pacific war. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, the CCS had accepted in principle a Central Pacific offensive aimed toward the general area of the Philippines but proceeding by way of the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas. In spite of objections by General MacArthur, this proposed offensive was finally incorporated in the Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan, with the seizure of the Marshalls and Carolines listed among the Allied goals for 1943–1944. Overall strategy against Japan called for two coordinated drives, one westward across the Central Pacific and the other, by MacArthur's forces, northward from New Guinea.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARIANAS²

The staunchest advocate of operations against the Marianas was

New Guinea and the Marianas. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited are located in the Marianas Area OpFile and Marianas CmtFile, HistBr, HQMC.

² Additional sources for this section include: CCS 397 (Rev), SpecificOps for the Defeat of Japan, dtd 3Dec43, CCS 417, 417/1, 417/2, Overall Plan for the Defeat of Japan, dtd Dec43, JCS 581, 581/1, 581/2, SpecificOps for the Defeat of Japan, dtd Nov–Dec43; JPS 264, Outline Plan for the Seizure of the Marianas, Incl Guam, dtd 6Sep43 (OPD–ABC Files,

Admiral King, who believed that the capture of these islands would sever the enemy's lines of supply to Truk and Rabaul and provide bases for operations against targets farther west. During the Quebec meeting of Anglo-American planners, a conference that lasted from 14 to 24 August 1943, the admiral again stressed the importance of the Marianas. British representatives asked King if it might not be wise to restrict operations in MacArthur's theater so that the Allies might divert to Europe some of the men and material destined for the Southwest Pacific. The admiral answered that "if forces were so released they should be concentrated on the island thrust through the Central Pacific."³ He added, however, that he considered the two offensives against the Japanese to be complementary. General Marshall then pointed out that the troops scheduled for the New Guinea operations were either en route to or already stationed in the Southwest Pacific.

At Quebec the CCS approved the forthcoming operations against the Gilberts and Marshalls but merely listed the Marianas as a possible objective to be attacked, if necessary, when American forces had advanced to within striking distance. The Ameri-

can Joint Planning Staff, acting upon this tentative commitment, began preparing an outline plan for the conquest of the Marianas. When Admiral Nimitz turned his attention to the Central Pacific drive approved at Quebec, he noted that the Marianas might serve as an alternate objective to the Palaus. In brief, amphibious forces might thrust to the Philippines by way of the Carolines and Palaus or strike directly toward the heart of the Japanese empire after seizing bases in the Marianas and Bonins. The agreements reached at Quebec also affected General MacArthur's plans, for the Allies gave final acceptance to the JCS recommendation that Rabaul should be bypassed. This decision, although it changed the general's plans, actually enabled him to speed his own advance toward the Philippines. (See Map I, Map Section.)

As the next meeting of the Anglo-American Chiefs of Staff, scheduled for November 1943, drew nearer, the JCS began preparing its proposals for the future conduct of the Pacific war. Among the items under discussion was the employment of a new long-range bomber, the B-29, against Japanese industry. This plane, according to General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, "would have an immediate and marked effect upon the Japanese and if delivered in sufficient quantities, would undoubtedly go far to shorten the war."⁴

At this time, Arnold was planning to strike from bases on the Chinese main-

WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.); CinCPOA Campaign GRANITE, prelim draft, dtd 27Dec43; CinCPOA Outline Campaign Plan GRANITE, dtd 13Jan44; CinCPOA Outline Campaign Plan GRANITE II, dtd 3Jun44; CinCPOA JntStfStudy FORAGER, dtd 20Mar44; CinCPac-CinCPOA memo to CominCh, dtd 30Sep43, subj: GarRequirements for CenPacArea, with encls A-C (OPlan File, OAB, NHD).

³ King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 485.

⁴ JCS, Minutes of the 122d Meeting, 9Nov43, p. 2 (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

land, an undertaking which required new flying fields, a vast amount of fuel and supplies, numerous American flight crews, mechanics, and technicians, and a strengthening of the Chinese Nationalist armies defending the bases. The large airfield nearest Japan was at Chengtu, 1,600 miles from any worthwhile target. If necessary, the B-29's, loaded with extra gasoline instead of high explosives, could take off from India, fly to advanced airfields in China where the emergency fuel tanks could be replaced with bombs, then continue to the Japanese home islands. Unfortunately, the Chinese might prove incapable of holding these way-stations on the aerial road to Japan. What was needed were bases secure from enemy pressure but within range of the Home Islands. The solution lay in the Marianas, some 1,200 miles from the Japanese homeland, but this group was in the hands of the enemy. Army Air Force planners urged that the Marianas be captured and developed as B-29 bases, but they also desired to begin the strategic bombing of Japan as quickly as possible, using the India-China route.⁵

General Arnold was confident that masses of B-29s could destroy Japan's "steel, airplane, and other factories, oil reserves, and refineries," which were concentrated in and around "extremely inflammable cities."⁶ His colleagues, already looking ahead to the invasion of Japan, apparently shared his conviction, for they accepted as a basis for

planning the assumption, set forth by Vice Admiral Russell Willson, that: "If we can isolate Japan by a sea and air blockade, whittle down her fleet, and wipe out her vulnerable cities by air bombardment, I feel that there may be no need for invading Japan—except possibly by an occupying force against little or no opposition—to take advantage of her disintegration."⁷

The importance attached to strategic bombardment and naval blockade caused the Marianas to assume an increasing significance in American plans, since submarines as well as aircraft might operate from the island group. Evidence of the value of the Marianas was the recommendation by the Strategy Section to the Strategy and Policy Group of the Army Operations Division that the island bases, once they were ready for operations, should have priority over the mainland fields in the allotment of aircraft. "It is self-evident," Army strategists remarked, "that these aircraft should operate from bases within striking range of Japan proper, if that is possible, rather than from a more distant base such as Chengtu."⁸ Throughout SEXTANT, as the latest international meeting was called, the United States emphasized the need for air bases in the western Pacific.

The SEXTANT conference, 22

⁵ Gen of the AF Henry H. Arnold, USAF, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 477-480.

⁶ JCS, Minutes of the 123d Meeting, 15Nov 43, p. 9 (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁷ VAdm Russell Willson memo to Adm Ernest J. King, dtd 11Nov43, subj: Plan for Defeat of Japan (OPD-ABC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

⁸ Col J. J. Billo, USA, memo to BGen George A. Lincoln, USA, dtd 7Dec43, subj: Specific Ops for the Defeat of Japan (CCS 397) (OPD-AGC Files, WWII RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

November-7 December 1943, actually was a series of discussions among Allied leaders. After conversations with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek at Cairo, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and their advisors journeyed to Teheran, Iran, where they met a Soviet staff led by Marshal Joseph Stalin. The Anglo-American contingent then returned to Cairo so that the combined staffs might revise their world-wide strategy to include commitments made to either Nationalist China or the Soviet Union.

Out of SEXTANT came a schedule, drafted for planning purposes, which called for the invasion of the Marianas on 1 October 1944 and the subsequent bombing by planes based in the islands of targets in and near the Japanese home islands. The date of the Marianas operation, however, might be advanced if the Japanese fleet were destroyed, if the enemy began abandoning his island outposts, if Germany suddenly collapsed, or if Russia entered the Pacific war. The strategy behind this timetable called for two series of mutually supporting operations, one by MacArthur's troops, and the other by Nimitz' Central Pacific forces. Since the advance across the Central Pacific promised the more rapid capture of airfields from which to attack Japan and could result in a crushing defeat for the Japanese navy, Nimitz would have priority in men and equipment. The timing of MacArthur's blows would depend upon progress in the Central Pacific. Planners believed that by the spring of 1945 both prongs of the American offensive would have penetrated deeply enough into the enemy's

defenses to permit an attack in the Luzon-Formosa-China area.

On 27 December, area planning began as Nimitz issued his GRANITE campaign plan, a tentative schedule of Central Pacific operations which also helped to establish target dates for landings in the Southwest Pacific that would require support by the Pacific Fleet. First would come FLINT-LOCK, scheduled for 31 January 1944, then the assault on Kavieng, 20 March, which would coincide with an aerial attack on Truk. On 20 April, MacArthur's troops, supported by Nimitz' warships, would swarm ashore at Manus Island. The fighting would then shift to the Central Pacific for the Eniwetok assault, then set for 1 May, the landing at Mortlock (Nomoi) 1 July, and the conquest of Truk to begin on 15 August. The tentative target date for the Marianas operation, which included the capture of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, was 15 November 1944.

As if to prove that his GRANITE plan was more flexible than the mineral for which it was named, the admiral on 13 January advanced the capture of Mortlock and Truk in the Carolines, to 1 August. If these two landings should prove unnecessary, the Palau Islands to the west could serve as an alternate objective. From the Palaus, the offensive would veer northeastward to the Marianas, where the assault troops were to land on 1 November. Late in January 1944, Nimitz summoned representatives from the South Pacific and invited others from the Southwest Pacific to confer with his own staff officers on means of further speeding the war against Japan.

Nimitz, informed of the recent deci-

sions concerning B-29 bases, offered the conference a choice between storming Truk on 15 June, attacking the Marianas in September, and then seizing the Palaus in November or bypassing Truk, striking at the Marianas on 15 June, and then landing in the Palaus during October. Some of those present, however, were interested in neither alternative. The leader of these dissenters was General George C. Kenney, commander of Allied air forces in General MacArthur's theater, who managed to convince various Army and Navy officers that the Central Pacific campaign be halted in favor of a drive northward from New Guinea to the Philippines. As Kenney recalled these sessions, he remarked that "we had a regular love feast. [Rear Admiral Charles H.] McMorris, Nimitz' Chief of Staff, argued for the importance of capturing the Carolines and the Marshalls [FLINTLOCK was about to begin], but everyone else was for pooling everything along the New Guinea-Philippines axis."⁹ Although fewer than Kenney's estimated majority were willing to back a single offensive under MacArthur's leadership, a sizeable number of delegates wanted to by-pass the Marianas along with Truk. Nimitz, however, brought the assembled officers back to earth by pointing out that the fate of the Marianas was not under discussion. When reminded that the choice lay between neutralizing or seizing Truk before the

advance into the Marianas, they chose to bypass the Carolines fortress.

General MacArthur also saw no strategic value in an American conquest of the Marianas. He dispatched an envoy to Washington to urge that the major effort against Japan be directed by way of New Guinea and the Philippines. Like those who dissented during Nimitz' recent conference, the general's representative accomplished nothing, for the JCS had reached its decision.

On 12 March, the JCS issued a directive that embodied the decisions made during the recent Allied conferences. General MacArthur's proposed assault on Kavieng was cancelled, and the New Ireland fortress joined Rabaul on the growing list of bypassed strongholds. Southwest Pacific forces were to seize Hollandia, New Guinea, in April and then undertake those additional landings along the northern coast of the island which were judged necessary for future operations against the Palaus or Mindanao. This revision in the tasks to be undertaken in the South and Southwest Pacific enabled the Army general to return to Nimitz the fleet units borrowed for the Kavieng undertaking.

In the Central Pacific, where amphibious forces had seized Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls and carrier task groups had raided Truk, Nimitz was to concentrate upon targets in the Carolines, Palaus, and Marianas. His troops were scheduled to attack the Marianas on 15 June, while aircraft continued to pound the bypassed defenders of Truk. In addition, the admiral had the responsibility of protecting General MacArthur's flank during the attack upon Hollandia and sub-

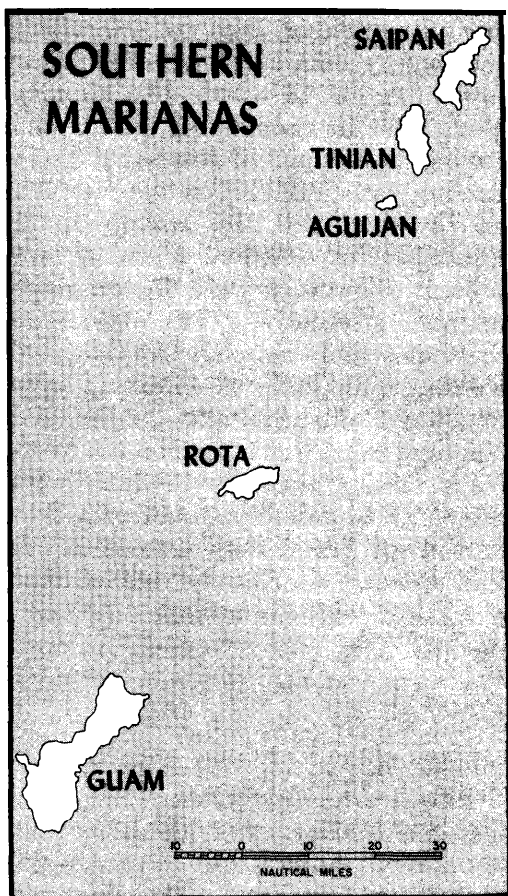
⁹ Gen George C. Kenney, USAF, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949), pp. 347-348.

sequent landings. Throughout these operations, the two area commanders would coordinate their efforts to provide mutual support.

Although the Marianas lacked protected anchorages, a fact which Nimitz had pointed out to the JCS, these islands were selected as the next objective in the Central Pacific campaign. The major factor that influenced American planners was the need for bases from which B-29s could bomb the Japanese homeland. Instead of seizing advance bases for the fleet, the mission which the Marine Corps had claimed at the turn of the century, Leathernecks would be employed to capture airfield sites for the Army Air Forces.

After receiving the JCS directive, Nimitz ordered his subordinates to concentrate upon plans for the Marianas enterprise and to abandon the staff work that had been started in preparation for an assault on Truk. On 20 March, the admiral issued a joint staff study for FORAGER, the invasion of the Marianas. The purpose of this operation was to capture bases from which to sever Japanese lines of communication, support the neutralization of Truk, begin the strategic bombing against the Palaus, Philippines, Formosa, and China. Target date for FORAGER was 15 June.

The decision to bypass Truk and Kavieng enabled Admiral Nimitz to alter the established schedule for the Central Pacific offensive. The revised campaign plan, GRANITE II, called for the capture of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian in the Marianas, to be followed on 8 September by landings at Palau. Southwest Pacific Area forces were to invade Mindanao on 15 November.



MAP 14

R. F. STIBIL

The final Central Pacific objective, with a tentative target date of 15 February 1945, would be either southern Formosa and Amoy or the island of Luzon. Not until October 1944 did the JCS officially cancel the Formosa-Amoy scheme, an operation that would have required five of six Marine divisions, in favor of the reconquest of Luzon.

The first of the Marianas Islands scheduled for conquest was Saipan. This objective was, in a military as well as a geographic sense, the center of the

group. Ocean traffic destined for the Marianas bases generally was channeled through Saipan. There, also, were the administrative headquarters for the entire chain, a large airfield and supplementary flight strip, as well as ample room for the construction of maintenance shops and supply depots. Finally, Saipan could serve as the base from which to attack Tinian, only three miles to the southwest, the island which had the finest airfields in the area. From Saipan, artillery could dominate portions of Tinian, but the western beaches of the northern island were beyond the range of batteries on Tinian. Thus, to strike first at Saipan was less risky than an initial blow at the neighboring island. Once the Americans had captured Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, the Japanese base at Rota would be isolated and subject to incessant aerial attack. (See Map 14.)

SAIPAN: THE FIRST OBJECTIVE¹⁰

The Mariana group is composed of 15 islands scattered along the 145th meridian, east longitude. The distance from Farallon de Pajaros at the northern extremity of the chain to Guam at its southern end is approximately 425 miles. Since the northern

islands are little more than volcanic peaks that have burst through the surface of the Pacific, only the larger of the southern Marianas are of military value. Those islands that figured in American and Japanese plans were Saipan, some 1,250 miles from Tokyo, Tinian, Rota, and Guam.

Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer sailing for Spain, discovered the Marianas in 1521. The sight of Chamorros manning their small craft so impressed the dauntless navigator that he christened the group *Islas de las Velas Latinas*, Islands of the Lateen Sails, in tribute to native seamanship. His sailors, equally impressed but for a different reason, chose the more widely accepted name *Islas de los Ladrones*, Islands of the Thieves. Possibly moved by this latter title to reform the Chamorros, Queen Maria Anna dispatched missionaries and soldiers to the group, which was retitled in her honor the Marianas.

All of these islands were Spanish possessions at the outbreak of war with the United States in 1898. During the summer of that year, an American warship accepted the surrender of Guam, a conquest that was affirmed by the treaty that ended the conflict. In 1899, the remaining islands were sold to Germany as Spain disposed of her Pacific empire. Japan seized the German Marianas during World War I. After the war, the League of Nations appointed Japan as trustee over all the group except American-ruled Guam. When Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1935, she retained her portion of the Marianas as well as the Marshalls and Carolines. In the years that followed, the Japanese government

¹⁰ Additional sources for this section include: JICPOA InfoBul 7-44, The Marianas, dtd 25Jan44, pp. 50-65; VAC G-2 Study of Southern Marianas, dtd 5Apr44; Tadao Yanaihara, *Pacific Islands under Japanese Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945, North American ed.).

kept its activities in the group cloaked in secrecy.

No single adjective can glibly describe the irregularly shaped island of Saipan. Three outcroppings, Agingan Point, Cape Obiam, and Nafutan Point, mark the profile of the southern coast. The western shoreline of Saipan extends almost due north from Agingan Point past the town of Charan Kanoa, past Afetna Point and the city of Garapan to Mutcho Point. Here, midway along the island, the coastline veers to the northeast, curving slightly to embrace Tanapag Harbor and finally terminating at rugged Marpi Point. The eastern shore wends its sinuous way southward from Marpi Point, beyond the Kagman Peninsula and Magicienne Bay, to the rocks of Nafutan Point. Cliffs guard most of the eastern and southern beaches from Marpi Point to Cape Obiam. There is a gap in this barrier inland of Magicienne Bay, but a reef, located close inshore, serves to hinder small craft. Although the western beaches are comparatively level, a reef extends from the vicinity of Marpi Point to an opening off Tanapag Harbor, then continues, though broken by several gaps, to Agingan Point. (See Map 15.)

Saipan encompasses some 72 square miles. The terrain varies from the swamps inland of Charan Kanoa to the mountains along the spine of the island and includes a relatively level plain. The most formidable height is 1,554-foot Mount Tapotchau near the center of the island. From this peak, a ridge, broken by other mountain heights, runs northward to 833-foot Mount Marpi. To the south and southeast of Mount Tapotchau, the ground tapers down-

ward to form a plateau, but the surface of this plain is broken by scattered peaks. Both Mounts Kagman and Nafutan, for example, rise over 400 feet above sea level, while Mount Fina Susu, inland of Charan Kanoa, reaches almost 300 feet. The most level regions—the southern part of the island and the narrow coastal plain—were under intense cultivation at the time of the American landings. The principal crop was sugar cane, which grew in thickets dense enough to halt anyone not armed with a machete. Refineries had been built at Charan Kanoa and Garapan, and rail lines connected these processing centers with the sugar plantations.

Saipan weather promised to be both warm, 75 to 85 degrees, and damp, for the invasion was scheduled to take place in the midst of the rainy season. Planners, however, believed that the operation would end before August, usually the wettest month of the year. Typhoons, which originate in the Marianas, posed little danger to the expedition for such storms generally pass beyond the group before reaching their full fury.

As American strategists realized, Saipan offered no harbor that compared favorably with the atoll anchorages captured in previous operations. The Japanese had improved Tanapag Harbor on the west coast, but there the reef offered scant protection to anchored vessels. Ships which chose to unload off Garapan, just to the south, were at the mercy of westerly winds. The deep waters of Magicienne Bay, on the opposite shore, were protected on the north and west but exposed to winds from the southeast.

The geography of the objective influenced both planning and training. The size of the island, the reefs and cliffs that guarded its coasts, its cane fields and mountains, and the disadvantages of its harbors had to be considered by both tactical and logistical planners. Whatever their schemes of maneuver and supply, the attackers would encounter dense cane fields, jungles, mountains, cities or towns, and possibly swamps. The Marines would have to prepare to wage a lengthy battle for ground far different from the coral atolls of the Gilberts and Marshalls.

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Since FORAGER contemplated the eventual employment of three Marine divisions, a Marine brigade, and two Army divisions against three distinct objectives within the Mariana group, the command structure was bound to be somewhat complex. Once again, Admiral Nimitz, who bore overall responsibility for the operation, entrusted command of the forces involved to Admiral Spruance. As Commander, Central Pacific Task Forces, Spruance held military command of all units involved in FORAGER and was responsible for coordinating and supervising their performance.¹¹ He was to select the times of the landings at Tinian, Guam, and any lesser islands not mentioned in the operation plan and to determine when the capture and occupation of each objective had been

completed. As Commander, Fifth Fleet, he also had the task of thwarting any effort by the *Combined Fleet* to contest the invasion of the Marianas.

Vice Admiral Turner, Commander, Joint Amphibious Forces (Task Force 51), would exercise command over the amphibious task organizations scheduled to take part in FORAGER. The admiral, under the title of Commander, Northern Attack Force, reserved for himself tactical command over the Saipan landings. As his second-in-command, and commander of the Western Landing Group, which comprised the main assault forces for Saipan, Turner had the veteran Admiral Hill.¹² At both Tinian and Guam, Turner would exercise his authority through the appropriate attack force commander.

In command of all garrison troops as well as the landing forces was Holland M. Smith, now a lieutenant general. Smith, Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, also served as Commanding General, Northern Troops and Landing Force (NTLF) at Saipan. As commander of the expeditionary troops, he exercised authority through the landing force commander at a given objective from the time that the amphibious phase ended until the capture and occupation phase was completed. Thanks to his dual capacity at Saipan, the general would establish his command post ashore when he believed the beachhead to be secured, report this move to the attack force commander, and begin directing the battle for the island. Since Saipan was a large enough land mass to require a 2-divi-

¹¹ RAdm Charles J. Moore cmts on draft MS, dtd 1Feb63, hereafter *Moore comments Saipan*.

¹² Adm Harry W. Hill cmts on draft MS, dtd 6Feb63, hereafter *Hill comments Saipan*.

sion landing force, Smith would be the equivalent of a corps commander.

Faced with the burdens of twin commands, the Marine general reorganized his VAC staff as soon as the preliminary planning for the Marianas operation had been completed. For detailed planning, he could rely on a Red Staff, which was to assist him in exercising command over Northern Troops and Landing Force, and a Blue Staff, which would advise him in making decisions as Commander, Expeditionary Troops.

Apart from his role in FORAGER, Smith was charged, in addition, with "complete administrative control and logistical responsibility for all Fleet Marine Force units employed in the Central Pacific Area."¹³ Since all Marine divisions in the Pacific were destined for eventual service in Nimitz' theater, the general was empowered to establish an administrative command which included a supply service. Once the Marianas campaign was completed, Nimitz intended to install Smith as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, with control over the administrative command and two amphibious corps.¹⁴

Northern Troops and Landing Force was composed of two veteran divisions led by experienced commanders. The 2d Marine Division, which had earned battle honors at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, was now commanded by Major General Thomas E. Watson,

whose Tactical Group 1 had seized Eniwetok Atoll. Major General Harry Schmidt's 4th Marine Division had received its introduction to combat during FLINTLOCK. The second major portion of Expeditionary Troops, Southern Troops and Landing Force, was under the command of Major General Roy S. Geiger, a naval aviator, who had directed an amphibious corps during the Bougainville fighting. Geiger's force consisted of the 3d Marine Division, tested at Bougainville, and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. The brigade boasted the 22d Marines, a unit that had fought valiantly at Eniwetok Atoll, and the 4th Marines. Although the 4th Marines, organized in the South Pacific, had engaged only in the occupation of Emirau Island, most of its men were former raiders experienced in jungle warfare.

During the interval between the Kwajalein and Saipan campaigns, the Marine Corps approved revised tables of organizations for its divisions and their components, a decision which affected both the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. Aggregate strength of the new model division was 17,465, instead of the previous 19,965. The principal components now were a headquarters battalion, a tank battalion, service troops, a pioneer battalion, an engineer battalion, an artillery regiment, and three infantry regiments. Service troops included service, motor transport, and medical battalions; the component once designated "special troops" existed no longer. The new tables called for the elimination of the naval construction battalion that had been part of the discarded engineer regiment and the transfer of the scout company,

¹³ AdminHist, FMFPac, 1944-1946, dtd 13 May46 (AdminHist File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹⁴ A provisional Headquarters, FMFPac was established on 24 August 1944. A detailed account of the formation of FMFPac along with its administrative and supply components will be included in the fourth volume of this series.

now reconnaissance company, from the tank battalion to headquarters battalion. The artillery regiment was deprived of one of its 75mm pack howitzer battalions, leaving two 75mm and two 105mm howitzer battalions. The infantry regiments continued to consist of three infantry battalions and a weapons company. The old 12-man rifle squad was increased to a strength of 13 and divided into three 4-man fire teams. Finally, the special weapons battalion had been disbanded and its antitank duties handed over to the regimental weapons companies, while the amphibian tractor battalion was made a part of corps troops.

Except for the absence of LVTs, the most striking change in the revised division's equipment was the substitution of 46 medium tanks for 54 light tanks within the tank battalion. The authorized number of flamethrowers had been gradually increased from 24 portables to 243 of this variety plus 24 of a new type that could be mounted in tanks, thus giving official approval to the common practice of issuing prior to combat as many flamethrowers as a division could lay hands upon. The artillery regiment lost 12 75mm pack howitzers, but the number of mortars available to infantry commanders was increased from 81 60mm and 36 81mm to 117 60mm and 36 81mm. Since each of the newly authorized fire teams contained an automatic rifle, the new division boasted 853 of these weapons and 5,436 M1 rifles instead of 558 automatic rifles and 8,030 M1s. Although it would seem that the reorganized division could extract a greater volume of fire from fewer men, such a unit also would require reinforcements, no-

tably a 535-man amphibian tractor battalion, before attempting amphibious operations.¹⁵

Both Marine divisions scheduled for employment at Saipan were almost completely reorganized before their departure for the objective. Neither had disbanded its engineer regiment although the organic naval construction battalions were now attached and would revert to corps control after the landing.¹⁶ The two surviving Marine battalions were originally formed according to discarded tables of organization as pioneer and engineer units. Thus, they could perform their usual functions even though they remained components of a regiment rather than separate battalions. Reinforced for the Saipan landings, its infantry battalions organized as landing teams and its infantry regiments as combat teams, each of the two divisions numbered approximately 22,000 men.¹⁷ In contrast, the 27th Infantry Division, serving as FORAGER reserve, could muster only 16,404 officers and men when fully reinforced.

During the battle for Saipan, the attacking Marines would be supported by heavier artillery weapons than the 75mm and 105mm howitzers that had aided them in previous Central Pacific operations. Two Army 155mm how-

¹⁵ TO F-100, MarDiv, dtd 5May44; F-30, ArtyRegt, dtd 21Feb44; F-80 TkBn, dtd 4 Apr44; F-89, ReconCo, HqBn, dtd 4Apr44; F-70, ServTrps, dtd 12Apr44 (TO File, HistBr, HQMC). A summary of TO F-100, Marine Division, is included as Appendix F.

¹⁶ BGen Ewart S. Laue ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 29Jun63, hereafter *Laue ltr*.

¹⁷ 4th MarDiv and 2d MarDiv WarDs, Feb-May44 (Unit File, HistBr, HQMC).

itzer battalions joined a pair of Army 155mm gun battalions to form XXIV Corps Artillery under command of Brigadier General Arthur M. Harper, USA. In addition, a Marine 155mm howitzer battalion was attached by VAC to the 10th Marines, artillery regiment for the 2d Marine Division. The 4th Marine Division, however, had to be content with an additional 105mm howitzer battalion. The remainder of VAC artillery was retained under corps control in Hawaii.¹⁸

Another division which might see action at Saipan was the FORAGER reserve, the 27th Infantry Division, an organization that had yet to fight as a unit. During GALVANIC, the division commanding general, Major General Ralph C. Smith, had led the 165th Infantry and 3/105 against enemy-held Makin Atoll. As part of Tactical Group 1, 1/106 and 2/106 had fought at Eniwetok Island. The remaining battalion of the 106th Infantry landed at Majuro where there was no opposition, and the other two battalions of the 105th Infantry lacked combat experience of any sort. Also in reserve was the inexperienced 77th Infantry Division, but this unit would remain in Hawaii as a strategic reserve until enough ships had returned from Saipan to carry it to the Marianas. Not until 20 days after the Saipan landings would the 77th Division become available to

Expeditionary Troops for employment in the embattled islands.

The effort against Saipan, then, rested in capable hands. The team of Spruance, Turner, and Holland Smith had worked together in the Gilberts and Marshalls. Both assault divisions were experienced and commanded by generals who had seen previous action in the Pacific war. Only the Expeditionary Force reserve, which might be employed at Saipan, was an unknown factor, for the various components of the 27th Infantry Division had not fought together as a team, and there was considerable difference in experience among its battalions.

*LOGISTICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PLANNING*¹⁹

In attacking Saipan, Nimitz' amphibious forces would encounter an objective unlike any they seized in previous Central Pacific operations. The mountainous island, with a total land area of some 72 square miles, was a far different battleground from the small, low-lying coral atolls of the Gilberts and Marshalls. The capture of this limited land mass could not be accomplished at a single stroke, a fact that was reflected in the plan of resupply adopted at the urging of General Holland Smith. The assault forces were directed to carry a 32-day supply of rations, enough fuel, lubricants,

¹⁸ As a consequence of the assignment of XXIV Corps Artillery to FORAGER, VAC Artillery served as part of the XXIV Corps in the assault on Leyte. The role of Marine artillery and air units in the Philippines campaign will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

¹⁹ Additional sources for this section include: NTLF AdminO 3-44, dtd 1May44; 2d MarDiv SplCmts, Phase I, FORAGER, n.d., p. 23; 4th MarDiv OpRpt Saipan, 15Jun-9Jul44, (incl Narrative, StfRpts, and Rpts of SuborUs), dtd 18Sep44, hereafter *4th Mar Div OpRpt*.

chemical, ordnance, engineer, and individual supplies to last for 20 days, a 30-day quantity of medical supplies, 7 days' ammunition for ground weapons, and a 10-day amount for antiaircraft guns.

Vast as this mountain of supplies might be, the Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, wanted still more. The Navy accepted his recommendations that an ammunition ship anchor off Saipan within five days after the landings and that supply vessels sailing from the continental United States be "block loaded." In other words, those ships that would arrive with general supplies after the campaign had begun should carry items common to all troop units in a sufficient quantity to last 3,000 men for 30 days. The portion of the plan dealing with ammunition resupply worked well enough, but block loading proved inefficient. Since the blocks had been loaded in successive increments, each particular item had to be completely unloaded before working parties could reach the next type of supplies. Admiral Turner later urged a return to the practice of loading resupply vessels so that the various kinds of cargo could be landed as needed. He saw no need in forcing many ships to carry a little bit of everything, when, by concentrating certain items in different ships, selective unloading was possible.

As usual, hold space was at a premium, so Expeditionary Troops kept close watch on the amount of equipment carried by assault and garrison units. The three divisions that figured in the Saipan plan adhered to the principles of combat loading, but only one, the 27th Infantry Division, made exten-

sive use of pallets. In fact, the Army unit exceeded the VAC dictum that from 25 to 50 percent of embarked division supplies be placed on pallets. The 2d Marine Division lashed about 25 percent of its bulk cargo to these wooden frames, while the 4th Marine Division placed no more than 15 percent of its supplies on pallets. General Schmidt's unit lacked the wood, waterproof paper, and skilled laborers necessary to comply with the wishes of corps. To complicate the 4th Marine Division loading, G-4 officers found that certain vessels assigned to carry cargo for Schmidt's troops were also to serve other organizations. In addition, the transports finally made available had less cargo space than anticipated. Under these circumstances, division planners elected to use every available cubic foot for supplies, vehicles, and equipment. Even if material had been available, there would have been room for few pallets.

Applying the lessons of previous amphibious operations, VAC addressed itself to the problems of moving supplies from the transports to the units fighting ashore. In April 1944, a Corps Provisional Engineer Group was formed, primarily to provide shore party units for future landings. The two Marine Divisions assigned to VAC for FORAGER had already established slightly different shore party organizations, but since both were trained in beachhead logistics, the engineer group did not demand that they be remodeled to fit a standard pattern. Backbone of the shore parties for both divisions were the pioneer battalions and the attached naval construction battalions.

The 2d Marine Division assigned pioneer troops as well as Seabees to each

shore party team, while the 4th Marine Division concentrated its naval construction specialists in support of a single regiment. If this construction battalion should be needed for road building or similar tasks, the 4th Marine Division would be forced to reorganize its shore party teams in the midst of the operation. Neither Marine division used combat troops to assist in the beachhead supply effort.

To support both the garrison and assault units assigned to FORAGER, the Marine Supply Service organized the 5th and 7th Field Depots.²⁰ Marines trained to perform extensive repairs on weapons, fire control equipment, and vehicles accompanied the landing forces, while technicians capable of making even more thorough repairs embarked with the garrison troops. The 7th Field Depot was chosen to store and issue supplies, distribute ammunition, and salvage and repair equipment on both Saipan and Tinian. The 5th Field Depot would perform similar duties on Guam. At the conclusion of FORAGER, the two depots were to assist in re-equipping the 2d and 3d Marine Divisions by accepting, repairing, and re-issuing items turned in prior to their departure from the Marianas by the 4th Marine Division and 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. Since plans called for Saipan to be garrisoned primarily by Army troops, the 7th Field Depot eventually would move its facilities to nearby Tinian, although it

²⁰ The story of the development of the Marine Supply Service as part of the overall picture of the formation of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

would continue to serve Marine units on the other island.

Authority to determine which boats were to evacuate the wounded from Saipan rested in the beachmasters. During the early hours of the operation, casualties were to be collected in three specially equipped LSTs, treated, and then transferred to wards installed in certain of the transports. One of the hospital LSTs would take station off the beaches assigned to each of the Marine divisions. The third such vessel was to relieve whichever of the other two was first to receive 100 casualties. Each of the trio of landing ships had a permanent medical staff of one doctor and eight corpsmen. An additional 2 doctors and 16 corpsmen would be re-assigned from the transports to each of the LSTs before the fighting began. Plans also called for hospital ships to arrive in the target area by D plus three or when ordered forward from Eniwetok by Admiral Turner. Detailed plans were also formulated for the air evacuation of severely wounded men from the Marianas. Planes of the Air Transport Command, Army Air Forces, would load casualties at Aslito airfield and fly them to Oahu via Kwajalein.²¹

In spite of the scope of the Saipan undertaking and the possibility of numerous casualties, no replacement drafts were included in the expedition, for G-1 planners believed that men transferred from one unit could replace those lost by another. During the Saipan fighting, the 2d Marine Division

²¹ Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, dtd 29Jan63, hereafter *USAF Comments*.

was to be kept at peak effectiveness by the reassignment of troops from the 4th Marine Division. This plan, however, had to be abandoned, for the mass transfers required under such an arrangement would have crippled General Schmidt's division. Instead, replacement drafts were dispatched to Saipan during June and July.

INTELLIGENCE FOR SAIPAN

Until carrier planes attacked Saipan on 22-23 February 1944, American intelligence officers had no accurate information concerning the island defenses. As a result of these strikes, planners received aerial photographs of certain portions of the island. Ideal coverage, General Holland Smith's G-2 section believed, could be obtained if photographic missions were flown 90, 60, 30, and 15 days before the Saipan landings. Unfortunately, Navy carrier groups were too busy blasting other objectives to honor such a request, but additional pictures were taken by long-range Navy photo planes. Between 17 April and 6 June, Seventh Air Force B-24s escorted their Navy counterpart PB4Ys from Eniwetok to the Marianas on seven joint reconnaissance missions.²² Although the final set of photographs reached Expeditionary Troops headquarters at Eniwetok, where the expedition had paused en route to the objective, the assault elements had already set sail for Saipan. As a result, the troops that landed on 15 June did not benefit from the final aerial reconnaissance. Equally useless to the attacking divi-

sions were the photographs of the island beaches taken by the submarine *Greenling*, for these did not cover the preferred landing areas.

The aerial photographs taken by carrier aviators were not of the best quality, for the taking of pictures was more or less a sideline, and a dangerous one at that. First in the order of importance was the killing of Japanese, but the most profitable target for American bombs was not always the island or area which the intelligence experts wanted photographed. Admiral Spruance did for a time contemplate a second carrier strike against Saipan, a raid which would have netted additional photographs to supplement those taken in February by carrier aircraft and in April and May by Eniwetok-based photographic planes. In order to avoid disclosing the Marianas as the next American objective, the Admiral decided against the raid.

The photos obtained during the February raid along with charts captured in the Marshalls provided the information upon which Expeditionary Troops based its map of Saipan. Since the sources used did not give an accurate idea of ground contours, map makers had to assume that slopes were uniform unless shadows in the pictures indicated a sudden rise or sharp depression. Clouds, trees, and the angle at which the photos were taken helped hide the true nature of the terrain, so that many a cliff was interpreted on the map as a gentle slope. Fortunately, accurate Japanese maps were to be captured during the first week of fighting.

The strength, disposition, and armament of the Saipan garrison was difficult to determine. Documents cap-

²² *Ibid.*

tured in previous campaigns, reports of shipping activity, and aerial photographs provided information on the basic strength, probable reinforcement, and fixed defenses of the garrison. As D-Day approached, Admiral Turner and General Smith obtained additional fragments of the Saipan jigsaw puzzle, but full details, such as the complete enemy order of battle, would not be known until prisoners, captured messages, and reports from frontline Marine units became available.

On 9 May, Expeditionary Troops estimated that no more than 10,000 Japanese were stationed at Saipan, but by the eve of the invasion, this figure had soared to 15,000–17,600. This final estimate included 9,100–11,000 combat troops, 900–1,200 aviation personnel, 1,600–1,900 Japanese laborers plus 400–500 Koreans, and 3,000 “home guards,” recent recruits who were believed to be the scrapings from the bottom of the manpower barrel. The actual number of Japanese was approximately 30,000 soldiers and sailors plus hundreds of civilians.

Although aerial photographs gave the landing force an accurate count of the enemy's defensive installations, these pictures did not disclose the number of troops poised inland of the beaches. The number and type of emplacements, however, did indicate that reinforcements were pouring into the island. By comparing photos taken on 18 April with those taken on 29 May, intelligence experts discovered an increase of 30 medium antiaircraft guns, 71 light antiaircraft cannon or machine guns, 16 pillboxes, a dozen heavy antiaircraft guns, and other miscellaneous weapons.

Intelligence concerning Saipan was not as accurate as the information previously gathered for the Kwajalein campaign. The 1,000-mile distance of the objective from the nearest American base, the clouds which gathered over the Marianas at this time of year, and the fear of disclosing future plans by striking too often at Saipan were contributing factors. The lack of usable submarine photographs was offset by the possession of hydrographic charts seized in the Marshalls and by the boldness of underwater demolition teams. Under cover of naval gunfire, these units scouted the invasion beaches during daylight on D minus 1 to locate underwater obstacles.

TACTICAL PLANS

Northern Troops and Landing Force was assigned the capture of both Saipan and adjacent Tinian. For these operations, service and administrative elements of the command were banded together in Corps Troops, while the combat elements were the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, supported by XXIV Corps Artillery. One Marine infantry battalion, 1/2, was withdrawn from the 2d Marine Division and placed under corps control for a special operation in connection with the Saipan landing. To replace this unit, General Watson was subsequently given the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines. This outfit, made up of drafts from the 2d Division, was located at Hilo, Hawaii. After the campaign, 1/29 was destined to join the rest of its regiment at Guadalcanal and form part of the

6th Marine Division.²³ In addition to the combat troops, NTLF also controlled two garrison forces, composed mainly of Army units for Saipan and Marine units for Tinian. The 27th Infantry Division, as Expeditionary Troops reserve, might be employed to reinforce Northern Troops and Landing Force at Saipan or Tinian, or to assist Southern Troops and Landing Force at Guam. As a result, the division G-3 section prepared 21 operation plans, 16 of them dealing with possible employment at Saipan.

The basic scheme of maneuver for the Saipan attack called for the 23d and 25th Marines, 4th Marine Division, to land on the morning of 15 June over the Blue Beaches off the town of Charan Kanoa and across the Yellow Beaches, which extended southward from that town toward Agingan Point. At the same time, the 6th and 8th Marines, 2d Marine Division, were to land on the Red and Green Beaches just north of Charan Kanoa. To deceive the enemy, General Smith decided to make a feint toward the coastline north of Tanapag Harbor, a maneuver which he assigned to the 2d Marines, including 1/29, and the 24th Marines. (See Map 16.)

Another portion of the plan, one that eventually was canceled, would have sent 1/2 ashore near the east coast village of Laulau on the night of 14-15 June. This reinforced battalion was to have pushed inland to occupy the crest of Mount Tapotchau and hold that position until relieved by troops from the western beachhead. After this part of the plan had been aban-

doned, 1/2 remained ready to land on order at Magicienne Bay, or, if the tactical situation demanded, elsewhere on the island.

Striking inland, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions were to seize the high ground that stretched southward from Hill 410 through Mount Fina Susu to Agingan Point. Since this high ground dominating the beaches had to be seized as rapidly as possible, the LVTs and their escorting LVT(A)s were to thrust toward the ridge line, bypassing pockets of resistance along the shore. From this terrain feature, General Schmidt's division was to push eastward beyond Aslito Airfield to Nafutan Point, while General Watson's Marines secured the shores of Magicienne Bay and attacked northward toward Marpi Point. Among the intermediate objectives of the 2d Marine Division during this final advance were Mount Tipo Pale, Mount Tapotchau, and the city of Garapan.

The ship-to-shore movement that would trigger the battle for Saipan was patterned after earlier amphibious operations in the Marshalls. Because of the reef that guarded the landing sites, LVTs were required by the attacking Marines. Northern Troops and Landing Force had a total of six amphibian tractor battalions, three of them, the 2d, 4th, and 10th, Marine units and the others, the 534th, 715th, and 773d, Army organizations. The tractors assigned to the assault infantry battalions, as well as those assigned to one reserve battalion in each division, were ferried to Saipan in LSTs. Since the tank landing ships also carried the Marines assigned to land in these LVTs, relatively few assault

²³ BGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins ltr to ACoFS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 4Jan63.

troops would be forced to transfer from one type of craft to another. All reserve infantry elements, except for the two battalions assigned to LSTs, were scheduled to proceed in LCVs from their transports to a designated area where they would change to LVTs. The organic field artillery regiments of both divisions embarked their battalions in LSTs. The 75mm howitzers and crews were to land in LVTs, and the 105s in DUKWs. Both types of weapons were placed in the appropriate vehicles before the expedition sailed. Tanks once again were preloaded in LCMs, and these craft embarked in LSDs.

The assault on Saipan would be led by rocket-firing LCI gunboats which were followed by armored amphibian tractors. The LVT(A)4s, manned by the Marine 2d Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion, were modifications of the type used in the Marshalls. Instead of a 37mm gun and three .30 caliber machine guns, the new vehicles boasted a snub-nosed 75mm howitzer mounted in a turret and a .50 caliber machine gun. The other unit assigned to the Saipan operation, the Army's 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion, was equipped with older LVT(A)1s and a few LVT(A)4s.

To control the Saipan landings, Admiral Hill selected officers experienced in amphibious warfare. At the apex of the control pyramid was the force control officer, who had overall responsibility for controlling all landing craft involved in getting two divisions ashore on a frontage of some 6,000 yards.²⁴ A group control officer was assigned each

division, and a transport division control officer was in charge of each regiment in the landing force. On D-Day, the force control officer would, by means of visual signals and radio messages, summon the leading waves to the line of departure and dispatch them toward the island. Transport division control officers had the tasks of sending in the later waves according to a fixed schedule and of landing reserves as requested by the regimental commander or his representatives.

One LCC was stationed on either flank of the first wave formed by each assault regiment. These vessels were to set the pace for the amphibian tractors in addition to keeping those vehicles from wandering from course. When the initial wave crossed the reef, a barrier which the control craft could not cross, the LCCs would take up station seaward of that obstacle to supervise the transfer of reserve units from LCVs to LVTs. Later assault waves would rely on designated LCVs to guide them as far as the reef.

Since communications had been the key to control in previous operations, Admiral Turner decided to employ at Saipan 14 communications teams, each one made up of an officer, four radio-men, and two signalmen. In addition to placing these teams where he thought them necessary, the admiral had additional radio equipment installed in the patrol craft, submarine chasers, and LCCs that were serving as control vessels. In this way, adequate radio channels were available to everyone involved in controlling the landings, the supply effort, and the evacuation of casualties.

²⁴ *Hill comments Saipan.*

AIR AND NAVAL GUNFIRE SUPPORT

After Navy pilots based on fast carriers had destroyed Japanese air power in the Marianas, other aviators could begin operations designed to aid the amphibious striking force. Because of its size, Saipan imposed new demands upon supporting aircraft. Pilots assisting an attack against an atoll could concentrate on a relatively small area, but in their strikes against a comparatively large volcanic island, the aviators would have to range far inland to destroy enemy artillery and mortars which could not be reached by naval guns and to thwart efforts to reinforce coastal defense units. The neutralization of the beach fortifications was to follow a flexible schedule, while strikes against defiladed gun positions or road traffic could be launched as required by planes on station over the island.

The first D-Day attack against the beach defenses was a 30-minute bombing raid scheduled to begin 90 minutes before H-Hour. Naval gunfire would be halted while the planes made their runs. This strike was intended to demoralize enemy troops posted along the beaches as well as to destroy particular installations.

To make up for the absence of field artillery support, such as had been enjoyed in the Marshalls, aircraft were ordered to strafe the beaches while the incoming LVTs were between 800 and 100 yards of the island. This aerial attack would coincide in part with the planned bombardment by warships of this same area, for naval gunfire would not be shifted until the troops were 300 yards from the objective. Pilots were

informed of the maximum ordinate of the naval guns, and since their shells followed a rather flat trajectory, the approach of the planes would not be seriously hindered. When the leading wave was 100 yards from its objective, the aviators were to shift their point of aim 100 yards inland and continue strafing until the Marines landed.

Prior to H-Hour, all buildings, suspected weapons emplacements, and possible assembly areas more than 1,000 yards from the coastline were left to the attention of naval airmen. Planes armed with bombs or rockets had the assignment of patrolling specific portions of Saipan to attack both previously located installations and targets of opportunity. After the landings, aircraft would cooperate with naval gunfire and artillery in destroying enemy strongpoints and hindering Japanese road traffic.

The air support plan also provided for the execution of strikes at the request of ground units. A Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft was appointed primarily to insure coordination between artillery and support aviation. A requested strike might be directed by any of four individuals: the Airborne Coordinator, aloft over the battlefield; the leader of the flight on station over the target area; the Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft with headquarters ashore; or the Commander Support Aircraft, located in the command ship and aware of the naval gunfire plan.

The decision whether to handle the strike himself or delegate it to another was left to the Commander Support Aircraft. He would select the person best informed on the ground situation

to direct a particular attack. He also had the responsibility of insuring that his subordinates were fully informed concerning troop dispositions and any plans to employ other supporting weapons.

The preliminary naval bombardment of Saipan was to begin on D minus 2 with the arrival off the objective of fast battleships and destroyers from Task Force 58. The seven battleships, directed to remain beyond the range of shore batteries and away from possible minefields, would fire from distances in excess of 10,000 yards. The nocturnal harassment of the enemy was left to the destroyers. On the following day, the fire support ships, cruiser, destroyers, and old battleships were scheduled to begin hammering Saipan from close range.

The plan for D-Day called for the main batteries of the supporting battleships and cruisers to pound the beaches until the first wave was about 1,000 yards from shore. The big guns would then shift to targets beyond the

0-1 Line, which stretched from the northern extremity of Red 1 through Hill 410 and Mount Fina Susu to the vicinity of Agingan Point. Five-inch guns, however, were to continue slamming shells into the beaches until the troops were 300 yards from shore, when these weapons also would shift to other targets. The final neutralization of the coastal defenses was left to the low-flying planes which had begun their strafing runs when the LVTs were 800 yards out to sea.

During the fighting ashore, on-call naval gunfire was planned for infantry units. To speed the response to calls for fire support, each shore fire control party was assigned the same radio frequency as the ship scheduled to deliver the fires and the plane that observed the fall of the salvos. A Landing Force Naval Gunfire Officer was selected to go ashore and work with the Landing Force Commander Support Aircraft and the Corps Artillery Officer in guaranteeing cooperation among the supporting arms.

American and Japanese Preparations¹

As the tactical plans were taking shape, the divisions slated for the Saipan operation began training for the impending battle. Ships were summoned to Hawaii to carry the invasion force to its destination. While the Americans gathered strength for the massive effort to seize the Marianas, the enemy looked to the defenses of the Central Pacific. In Hawaii, Marines and Army infantrymen practiced landing from LVTs in preparation for the Saipan assault. At the objective, Japanese troops were working just as hard to perfect their defenses.

TRAINING AND REHEARSALS

The Marine and Army units selected to conquer Saipan underwent training in the Hawaiian Islands designed to prepare them for combat in the jungle, cane fields, and mountains of the Mariana Islands. The scope of training matched the evolution of tactical plans, as individual and small unit training gave way to battalion exercises, and

these, in turn, were followed by regimental and division maneuvers. The 2d Marine Division, encamped on the island of Hawaii, did its training in an area that closely resembled volcanic Saipan. After its conquest of northern Kwajalein, the 4th Marine Division arrived at the island of Maui to begin building its living quarters and ranges—tasks which coincided with training for FORAGER. Both construction and tactical exercises were hampered by the nature of the soil, a clay which varied in color and texture from red dust to red mud. The 27th Infantry Division, on the island of Oahu, emphasized tank-infantry teamwork and the proper employment of JASCO units during amphibious operations. The XXIV Corps Artillery was in the meantime integrating into its ranks the coast artillerymen needed to bring the battalions to authorized strength, conducting firing exercises, and learning amphibious techniques.

Amphibious training got underway in March, when the 2d Marine Division landed on the shores of Maalaea Bay, Maui. The 4th Marine Division, Corps Troops, and the 27th Infantry Division received their practical instruction during the following month. The climax to the indoctrination scheduled by General Watson for his 2d Marine Division was a “walk through” rehearsal held on dry land. An outline of Saipan was drawn to scale on the ground, the various phase lines and unit boundaries

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *TG 52.2 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt Phase I, FORAGER* (incl a six-part narrative, four-part SAR, and SplCmts), dtd 11Sep44, hereafter *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *CominCh, The Marianas*; Crowl, *The Marianas*; Hoffman, *Saipan*; Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas*. A complete file of CinCPac-CinCPOA and JICPOA translations is available from OAB, NHD.

were marked, thereby enabling the Marines to see for themselves how the plan would be executed. "Yet," the commanding general recalled, "only a few commanders and staff officers of the thousands of men who participated in this rehearsal knew the real name of the target."²

On 17 and 19 May, the two Marine divisions took part in the final rehearsals of Northern Troops and Landing Force. The first exercise, conducted at Maalaea Bay, saw the Marines land on the beaches and advance inland, following the general scheme of maneuver for the Saipan operation. The second rehearsal was held at Kahoolawe Island, site of a naval gunfire target range. Although the roar of naval guns added realism to the exercise, the assault troops did not go ashore. After the landing craft had turned back, shore fire control parties landed to call for naval salvos against the already shell-scarred island. The 27th Infantry Division completed its rehearsals between 18 and 24 May. The independent 1/2 and its reinforcing elements climaxed the training cycle with landings at Hanalei Bay.

The rehearsals were marred by a series of accidents en route to Maui that killed 2 Marines, injured 16, and caused 17 others to be reported as missing. In the early morning darkness of 14 May, heavy seas caused the cables securing three Landing Craft, Tank (LCTs) to part, and the craft plummeted from the decks of their pa-

rent LSTs. Only one of the boats lost overboard remained afloat. The LCTs mounted 4.2-inch mortars, weapons which would have been used to interdict the road between Garapan and Charan-Kanoa and protect the flank of the 2d Marine Division.³

Since there was not enough time to obtain replacements for the lost mortars, Admiral Turner decided to rely on the scheduled rocket barrage by LCI(G)s for neutralization of beach defenses. He ordered those LSTs and the LCT that carried the heavy mortars and their supply of ammunition to unload upon their return to Pearl Harbor. As the mortar shells were being put ashore, tragedy struck again.

On 21 May, one of the 4.2-inch rounds exploded while it was being unloaded, touching off a conflagration that enveloped six landing ships. Navy fire-fighting craft tried valiantly to smother the flames, but, though they prevented the further spread of the blaze, they could not save the six LSTs from destruction. The gutted ships had carried assault troops as well as weapons and equipment, so losses were severe. The explosion and fire inflicted 95 casualties on the 2d Marine Division and 112 on the 4th Marine Division. Replacements were rushed to the units involved in the tragedy, but the new

² LtGen Thomas E. Watson ltr to Dir Div PubInfo, dtd 9Jun49, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 31. No copy of this letter has been found.

³ The arming and employment of these mortar craft was a project jointly developed by Admiral Hill and the CinCPac gunnery staff. Their intended mission was "cruising back and forth along a lighted buoy line close to the beach between Charan-Kanoa and Garapan and maintaining a constant barrage on the road connecting those two points throughout the first two or three nights after the landing." *Hill comments Saipan*.

men "were not trained to carry out the functions of those lost."⁴ The destroyed ships, equipment, and supplies were replaced in time for the LST convoy to sail on 25 May, just one day behind schedule. The lost time was made up en route to the objective.

ONWARD TO SAIPAN

The movement of Northern Troops and Landing Force plus the Expeditionary Troops reserve from Hawaii to Saipan was an undertaking that required a total of 110 transports. Involved in the operation were 37 troop transports of various types, 11 cargo ships, 5 LSDs, 47 LSTs, and 10 converted destroyers.⁵ Navy-manned Liberty ships, vessels that lacked adequate troop accommodations, were pressed into service as transports for a portion of the 27th Infantry Division. LSTs carrying assault troops, LVTs, and artillery from both Marine divisions set sail on 25 May. Two days later, transports bearing the remainder of the 4th Marine Division and Headquarters, Expeditionary Troops departed, to be followed on 30 May by elements of the 2d Marine Division. Because of the shortage of shipping, portions of XXIV Corps Artillery were

assigned to the transports carrying the assault divisions. Garrison units and Expeditionary Troops reserve were the last units to steam westward.

The transports carrying the Marines sailed to Eniwetok Atoll where they joined the LST convoy. Here additional assault units were transferred from the troop ships to the already crowded landing ships for the final portion of the voyage. One observer, writing of the journey from Eniwetok to Saipan, has claimed that because of the overcrowding, "aggressiveness was perhaps increased," for "after six crowded days aboard an LST, many Marines were ready to fight anybody."⁶ By 11 June, the last of the ships assigned to stage through Eniwetok had weighed anchor to begin the final approach to the objective. Meanwhile, the vessels carrying the 27th Infantry Division had completed their last-minute regrouping at Kwajalein Atoll.

While the vessels bearing General Holland Smith's 71,034 Marine and Army troops were advancing toward Saipan, the preparatory bombardment of the island got underway. The 16 carriers of Task Force 58 struck first, launching their planes on 11 June to begin a 3 1/2-day aerial campaign against Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Rota, and Pagan—the principal islands in the Marianas group. These attacks were originally to have started on the morning of the 12th, but Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, the task force commander, obtained permission to strike one-half day earlier. Mitscher felt that the enemy had become accustomed to early morning raids, so he planned

⁴ MajGen Louis R. Jones ltr to HistBr, HQMC, dtd 8Feb50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 34. No copy of this letter has been found.

⁵ The concentration of such an armada was a tribute to Navy planners, for the movement toward Saipan coincided with or immediately followed landings at Biak in the Schouten Islands, the sailing of the convoy that would carry Southern Troops and Landing Force to Guam, and the invasion of France.

⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 34n.

to attack in the afternoon. A fighter sweep conducted by 225 planes accounted for an estimated 150 Japanese aircraft on the first day, this insuring American control of the skies over the Marianas.

After the Grumman Hellcats departed, a member of the Saipan garrison noted in his diary that: "For two hours the enemy planes ran amuck and finally left leisurely amidst the unparal- leledly inaccurate antiaircraft fire. All we could do was watch helplessly." ⁷

On 12 and 13 June, bombers struck with impunity at the various islands and at shipping in the area. The only opposition was from antiaircraft guns like those on Tinian which "spread black smoke where the enemy planes weren't." One of Tinian's defenders glumly observed: "Now begins our cave life." ⁸

Admiral Mitscher's fast battleships opened fire on 13 June, but their long-range bombardment proved comparatively ineffective. With the exception of the USS *North Carolina*, which a naval gunfire officer of Northern Troops and Landing Force called "one of the best-shooting ships I ever fired," ⁹ the new battleships tended to fire into areas or at obvious if unimportant targets, rather than at carefully camouflaged weapons positions. Neither crews of the ships nor aerial observers who adjusted the salvos had been trained in the systematic bom-

bardment of shore emplacements. Although these battleships did not seriously damage the Japanese defenses, Admiral Spruance nonetheless believed that their contribution was valuable. The shelling by fast battleships, he later pointed out, "was never intended to take the place of the close-in fire of the [old battleships] to which it was a useful preliminary." ¹⁰

Seven old battleships with 11 attendant cruisers and 23 destroyers relieved the fast battleships on 14 June to begin blasting Saipan and Tinian. The quality of the bombardment improved, but all did not go according to plan, for the neutralization of Afetna and Nafutan Points proved difficult to attain. Although aircraft assisted the surface units by attacking targets in the rugged interior, the preliminary bombardment was not a complete success. The size of the island, the lack of time for a truly methodical bombardment, the large number of point targets, Japanese camouflage, and the enemy's use of mobile weapons all hampered the American attempt to shatter the Saipan defenses.

On the morning of 14 June, underwater demolition teams swam toward Beaches Red, Green, Yellow, and Blue, as well as toward the Scarlet Beaches, an alternate landing area north of Tanapag Harbor. This daylight reconnaissance was a difficult mission. Lieutenant Commander Draper L. Kauffman, leader of one of the demolition teams, had told Admiral Turner that "You don't swim in to somebody's

⁷ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,238, Diary of Tokuzo Matsuya.

⁸ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 11,405, Diary of an Unidentified Japanese NCO.

⁹ LtCol Joseph L. Stewart ltr to CMC, dtd 9Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 36. No copy of this letter has been found.

¹⁰ Adm Raymond A. Spruance ltr to CMC, dtd 17Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 37. No copy of this letter has been found.

beaches in broad daylight," but swim they did—in spite of Kauffman's prediction of 50 percent casualties.¹¹ Despite a screen of naval gunfire, which had difficulty in silencing the weapons sited to cover the waters of the Blue and Yellow Beaches, the teams lost two men killed and seven wounded, approximately 13 percent of their total strength. The swimmers reported the absence of artificial obstacles, the condition of the reef, and the depth of water off the beaches. On D-Day, members of these reconnaissance units would board control vessels to help guide the assault waves along the prescribed boat lanes. (See Map 16.)

The heavy naval and air bombardment directed against the Marianas were only a part of the preparations decided upon for FORAGER. Wake and Marcus Islands had been bombed during May in order to protect the movement of Admiral Turner's warships and transports. Bombs thudded into enemy bases from the Marshalls to the Kuriles in an effort to maintain pressure on the Japanese. Finally, on 14 June, two carrier groups cut loose from Task Force 58 to attack Iwo Jima, Haha Jima, and Chichi Jima in the Volcano-Bonin Islands. These strikes were designed to prevent the enemy from making good his aerial losses by transferring planes from the home islands to the Marianas by way of the Bonins.

Like the attacking Americans, the Japanese defenders were completing their preparations for the Saipan land-

ings. Fully alerted by the air and naval bombardment, the Saipan garrison realized that it soon would be called upon to fight to the death. Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata and Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo awaited the arrival of the Marines so that they could execute their portion of the A-GO plan, which called for the destruction of the invaders on the beaches of Saipan.

THE DEFENSE OF SAIPAN¹²

Saipan had long figured in Japanese military plans. As early as 1934, the year before her withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan had begun work on an airfield at the southern end of Saipan. By 1944, this installation, Aslito airfield, had become an important cog in the aerial defense mechanism devised to guard the Marianas. A seaplane base at Tanapag Harbor was completed in 1935, and during 1940-1941 money was appropriated for gun emplacements, storage bunkers, and other military structures.

On the eve of World War II, the *Fourth Fleet*, with headquarters at

¹¹ Cdr Francis D. Fane and Don Moore, *The Naked Warriors* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 88.

¹² Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos, 9,159, Organization of CenPac AreaFt, n.d., 10,145, Thirty-first Army Stf, TransRpt, dtd 18Mar44, 10,638, O/B for Thirty-first Army, 1942-1944, n.d., 10,740, Location and Strength of Naval Land Units, c. Apr44; HqFECOMd, MilHist Sec, Japanese Research Div, Monograph no. 45, *Imperial General Headquarters Army Section, mid-1941-Aug45*; HistSec, G-2, GHQ, FECOMd, Japanese Studies in WW II Monograph no. 55, *Central Pacific Operations Record, Apr-Nov44*; Northern Marianas GruO A-4 (with maps), dtd 24May44 in 4th MarDiv RepTranslations made on Saipan, hereafter *4th MarDiv Translations*.

Truk, had responsibility for the defense of the Marianas. The work of building, improving, and maintaining the island fortifications was the task of the *5th Base Force* and its attached units, the *5th Communications Unit* and *5th Defense Force*. Logistical support of the Marianas garrison was turned over to the *Fourth Fleet Naval Stores Department* and the *4th Naval Air Depot*, both located at Saipan. Originally the Marianas forces were to strengthen the defenses of the area and ready themselves for a possible war, but once Japan had begun preparing to strike at Pearl Harbor, the *5th Base Force* received orders to lay plans for the capture of Guam.

War came, Guam surrendered, and the Marianas became a rear area as Japanese troops steadily advanced. Since Saipan served primarily as a staging area, a sizeable garrison force was not needed. In May 1943, when the Gilberts marked the eastern limits of the Japanese empire, only 919 troops and 220 civilians were stationed on Saipan. As American forces thrust westward, reinforcements were rushed into the Marianas area.

During February 1944, Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls, both important bases, were seized by American amphibious forces. Within the space of three weeks, Saipan became a frontline outpost rather than a peaceful staging area. That portion of the *5th Special Base Force*¹³ located at Saipan, a con-

tingent which now numbered 1,437 men, was too weak to hold the island against a determined assault.

After the collapse of the Marshalls defenses and the withdrawal of fleet units from Truk, the Japanese established the *Central Pacific Area Fleet* under the command of Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo, who had led the Pearl Harbor raid, the successful foray into the Indian Ocean, and still later the ill-fated expedition against Midway. Nagumo's headquarters, charged with the defense of the Marianas, Bonins, and Palaus, was subordinate to Admiral Toyoda's *Combined Fleet*, now based at Tawi Tawi in the Philippines. The *Fourth Fleet*, relieved of overall responsibility for the Mandated Islands, retained control over Truk and the other eastern Carolines, as well as the isolated Marshalls outposts. (See Map I, Map Section.)

Nagumo's command, however, was an administrative organization unable to exert effective tactical control over the *Thirty-first Army*, the land force assigned to defend the various islands in the Marianas, Bonins, and Palaus. Initially, Nagumo was appointed supreme commander throughout this sector, but *Headquarters, Thirty-first Army* objected to being subordinated to a naval officer. By mid-March, Nagumo and Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata, the army commander, had sidestepped the issue, each one pledging himself to refrain from exercising complete authority over the other.

Instead of regarding the various island groups as an integrated theater under a unified command, the two officers, in keeping with an Army-Navy

¹³ On 10 April 1942, the *5th Base Force* was reorganized and redesignated the *5th Special Base Force*. Chief, WarHistOff, DefAgency of Japan, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 9Mar63.

agreement worked out by *Imperial General Headquarters*,¹⁴ chose to treat each island as an individual outpost, to be commanded by the senior Army or Navy officer present. At Saipan, for example, Rear Admiral Sugimura in command of the *5th Special Base Force*¹⁵ was originally given control over the defense of the island, but Obata reserved the right, in case of an American attack, of either commanding in person or designating a land commander of his own choice. Thus, the compromise left the general free to assume complete charge of the ground defense of any island in immediate danger of being stormed by Americans. Obata could assume overall responsibility for troop dispositions, coastal defense batteries, antiaircraft defenses, beach defenses, and communications. The employment of aircraft and the use of radar, however, would remain beyond his jurisdiction.¹⁶

This revision of the Central Pacific command structure reflected the increasing concern with which the Japanese high command regarded the defenses of Saipan and the other islands which lay in the path of the American offensive. Between February and May, two divisions, two independent brigades, two independent regiments, and three expeditionary units were rushed to the Marianas to form the *Marianas Sector Army Group* of Obata's *Thirty-first Army*. Naval strength in the islands was augmented by the arrival of the *55th* and *56th*

*Guard Forces*¹⁷ as well as antiaircraft and aviation units.

Prowling American submarines preyed upon the convoys that carried these reinforcements westward. One regiment of the *29th Division*, destined for Guam by way of Saipan, lost about half its men when a transport was torpedoed. Submarines also destroyed a vessel carrying some 1,000 reinforcements to the *54th Guard Force*, the unit which had garrisoned Guam since the capture of that island in December 1941. Five of the seven transports carrying elements of Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito's *43d Division* to Saipan went down en route to the Marianas, but the ships that stayed afloat managed to rescue most of the survivors. Units in this convoy lost about one-fifth of their total complement, most of these casualties from a single regiment. Also destroyed were numerous weapons and a great deal of equipment. These successful under-sea operations, strange to relate, resulted in the arrival at Saipan of some unscheduled reinforcements. About 1,500 troops, originally headed for Yap, were rescued when their transports were torpedoed and were added to the garrison of the Marianas bastion instead. Other survivors, members of units bound for the *Palau Sector Army Group*, also were put ashore at Saipan. In addition to these men, approximately 3,000 troops destined for garrisons on other islands of the Marianas and Carolines, were present on Saipan.¹⁸

Work on additional fortifications in the Marianas was handicapped by the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 12,058, *Thirty-first Army Stf Diary*, 25Feb44-31Mar44.

¹⁷ Japanese comments Saipan, *op cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

deadly submarines which destroyed vital cargos as efficiently as they claimed Japanese lives. Obata's chief of staff acknowledged the double effect of the underwater attacks. "The special point of differentiation in the Saipan battle," he observed late in the campaign, "is that units sunk late in May [the troops intended for Yap and the Palaus] and the 8,000 men who landed on 7 June [members of the *43d Division*] eventually landed not up to full combat strength. . . . Moreover, as they were still in the process of reorganization at the time of attack, our fighting strength on Saipan was in the process of flux."¹⁹ Could these ill-equipped troops be put to work building obstacles and gun emplacements? The answer was an emphatic "No." As the chief of staff pointed out, "unless the units are supplied with cement, steel reinforcements for cement, barbed wire, lumber, etc., which cannot be obtained in these islands, no matter how many soldiers there are, they can do nothing in regard to fortification but sit around with their arms folded, and the situation is unbearable."²⁰

The submarine campaign did not reach peak intensity in time to prevent the Japanese from building airfields throughout the Marianas. By June 1944, Guam boasted two operational fields and two others not yet completed, Tinian had three airfields with work underway on a fourth, and both Rota and Pagan were the sites of still other

flight strips. At Saipan, the old Aslito airfield, now less important than the new Tinian bases, was capable of handling extensive aerial traffic. One emergency strip was built near Charan Kanoa, but another such field, begun at Marpi Point, was as yet unfinished. Work on land defenses, however, was not as far advanced as airfield construction.

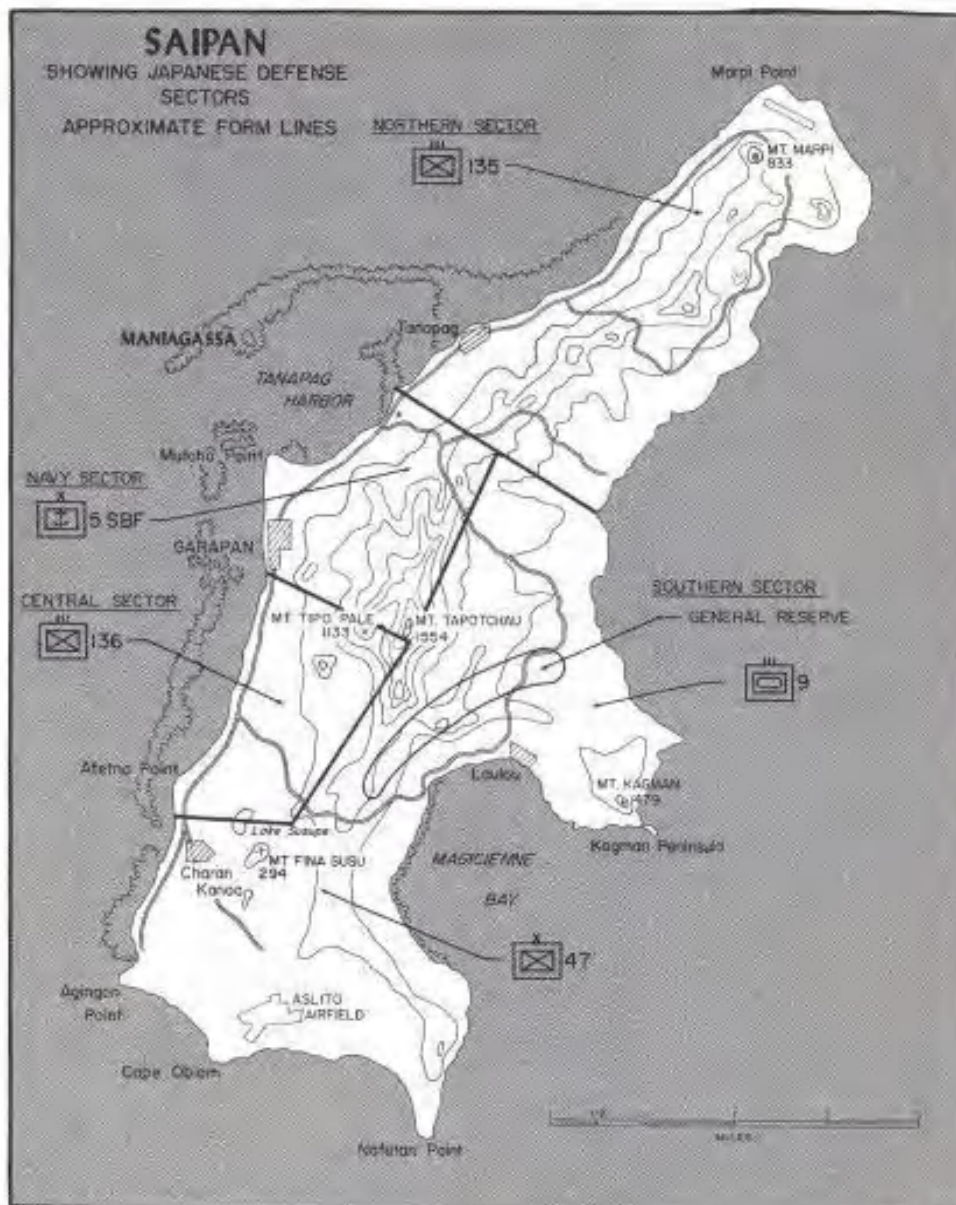
The defenders of Saipan planned to defeat the invaders on the beaches, but General Obata also hoped to prepare "positions in depth, converting actually the island into an invulnerable fortress."²¹ The coastal defenses sited to cover probable avenues of approach were completed. Five Navy coastal defense batteries on Saipan and one at outlying Maniagassa Island guarded the approaches lying between Agingan and Marpi Points. Two of these batteries, one armed with a 120mm and the other with a 150mm gun, could join twin-mounted 150mm pieces near Tanapag in engaging targets off the northwest coast. A 40mm battery of three guns protected Marpi Point, while Magicienne Bay was blanketed by the fires of four batteries, two of them mounting 200mm weapons. A lone battery of two 150mm guns guarded Nafutan Point. Army and Navy dual-purpose antiaircraft weapons reinforced the fires of these batteries, as did the Army artillery units located in southern Saipan.²²

¹⁹ NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 65, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

²⁰ CofS, Thirty-first Ar, Rpt of Defenses of Various islands, dtd 31May44, in *NTLF Translations of Captured Documents (FMFPac File, HistBr, HQMC)*.

²¹ Japanese Monograph No. 55, *op. cit.*

²² CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos. 12,250, Army and Navy AA, Dual Purpose, and Coastal DefBtrys on Saipan, n.d., 12,251, Order of Change of Location of Army AA Btrys on Saipan, dtd 10May44, and 12,252, Disposi-



MAP 15

R.F. STIBIL

Those beaches judged best suited for amphibious landings were guarded by powerful forces backed by comparatively feeble local reserves. A short distance inland, the enemy had prepared a second line designed to contain penetrations of the coastal perimeter until a counterattack could be organized. A tank regiment shouldered the main burden of eradicating any American salient, but Obata also held out four rifle companies and two shipping companies as a general reserve to join in counterthrusts. When the Japanese commander turned his attention to the rugged interior of Saipan, he discovered himself to be short of critical building materials, vital time, and necessary engineer units. The invulnerable fortress depicted by Obata was not fully realized, but he nevertheless selected certain redoubts, most of them in forbidding terrain. If the Americans smashed the first two lines, caves, gorges, and dense thickets would have to serve as pillboxes, antitank barriers, and barbed wire.

The Japanese plan of deployment divided Saipan into four sectors, three under Army command and one nominally entrusted to the Navy. Since 25,469 soldiers and only 6,160 sailors²³ were serving on the island, the division of responsibility seems equitable, but many of the naval units specialized in supply or administration, so Army troops were stationed in all areas. The northern sector, which lay beyond a

line drawn across the island just south of Tanapag, was protected by two battalions of the *135th Infantry Regiment* plus reinforcing elements. South of this zone, bounded on the east by a line drawn down the axis of the island and on the south by another line that stretched inland from just south of Garapan to include Mount Tapotchau, was the Navy sector, manned by a reinforced battalion from the *136th Infantry Regiment* and the *5th Special Base Force*. The naval unit included the recently arrived *55th Guard Force* as well as the *Yokosuka 1st Special Naval Landing Force*, which had served at Saipan since the autumn of 1943. The central sector, defended by elements of the *136th Infantry Regiment*, included that portion of Saipan that lay west of the spine of the island and north of a line drawn below Afetna Point. The remainder of the island was organized as the southern sector. Here Obata concentrated the bulk of his artillery and antiaircraft units, the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*, the *9th Tank Regiment*, and the remainder of his *43d Division*, which included a general reserve, certain shipping companies, and stragglers from several miscellaneous units. (See Map 15.)

Although Saipan and her neighboring islands were heavily reinforced, Japanese planners felt that the Palaus rather than the Marianas would be Nimitz' next objective. According to Admiral Toyoda, commander of the *Combined Fleet*, "while the possibility of your offensive against the Marianas was not ignored or belittled, we thought the probability would be that your attack would be directed against Palau, and that was the reason for our adop-

tions of Navy Dual Purpose and Coastal Defense Btry's on Saipan and Tinian, dtd 15May44.

²³ Crowl, *The Marianas*, p. 454. These revised figures will be used in preference to the estimates made by NTLF during the Saipan battle.

tion of the A-GO operation plan, which was to our advantage because of the shorter distance involved and would eliminate the need of tankers to some extent. . . .”²⁴

General MacArthur's sudden descent upon Biak in the Schouten Islands off New Guinea, an operation that began on 27 May, diverted attention from both the Palau chain and the Marianas. Since Biak possessed airfields from which planes could attack American ships moving northward into the Palaus, the Japanese prepared the *KON* plan, a scheme for reinforcing the threatened island. The first attempts to aid the embattled garrison ended in frustration, so Toyoda decided to commit the modern battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the most powerful surface units of the Japanese fleet. As this strengthened *KON* task force was assembling, American carriers hit the Marianas, so the enemy admiral left the reinforcement of Biak to destroyers, barges, and other small craft and ordered his forces to execute A-GO.

On 13 June, Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa led his *Mobile Fleet*, the A-GO striking force, from Tawi Tawi toward the Marianas. The *Yamato* and *Musashi*, with their attendant warships, steamed northward to a refueling rendezvous in the Philippine Sea, where they would join Ozawa's armada. Nimitz' blow at the Marianas caught the enemy somewhat off balance, for the ships dispatched toward Biak and the planes massed in the Palaus and eastern Carolines would have to be redeployed if they were to take part in the scheduled

annihilation of the American expedition. The shifting of the A-GO battlefield from the Palaus northward also forced Ozawa to steam a greater distance, pausing en route to refuel at sea. Yet, an American attack on the Marianas was not unexpected. A-GO could succeed, provided the Saipan garrison held firm and the 500 land-based planes promised to augment Ozawa's carrier squadrons actually arrived in the Marianas.

When American battleships arrived off Saipan, General Obata was absent from his headquarters on a tour of inspection of the Palaus. When he realized that Saipan was in peril, Obata tried to return, but he got only as far as Guam. Tactical command passed to General Saito of the *43d Division*. The savage pounding by naval guns and carrier planes battered the defenders but did not destroy their will to resist. One Japanese admitted that the naval bombardment was “too terrible for words,” but he nevertheless was “pleased to think” that he would “die in true Samurai style.”²⁵ A naval officer found momentary respite from his worries when he and a few of his men paused amid the ruins to bolster their spirits with five bottles of beer.²⁶

On 14 June, in the midst of the holocaust, Admiral Nagumo issued a warning that “the enemy is at this moment en route to attack us.” He went on to predict that American amphibious forces would land no later than July.

²⁴ *USSBS Interrogation* Nav No. 75, Adm Soemu Toyoda, IJN, II, p. 316.

²⁵ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,051, Extracts from the Diary of an Unidentified Soldier.

²⁶ CinCPac-CinCPOA Translations and Interrogations, No. 29, Item B-1938, Diary of a Naval Officer, Jun-Jul44.

After pointing out that the Marianas were the Japanese first line of defense, he directed each man to "mobilize his full powers to annihilate the enemy on the beach, to destroy his plan, and to hold our country's ramparts."²⁷ Along the western beaches of Saipan, members of frontline units were better informed than the admiral, for they could see the buoys which were being set out to aid in controlling the next day's assault.

The Saipan garrison had suffered

²⁷ ComCenPacFlt memo, dtd 14Jun44, in *NTLF Translations*.

from the preliminary bombardment, but the defenders were willing to fight. If humanly possible, they would defeat the Marines on the beaches. In the meantime, Ozawa's ships were beginning their voyage toward the Marianas. The portion of *A-GO* that called for aerial surface, and submarine attacks on the advancing American convoy had already gone awry. Possibly, the attackers could be wiped out before a beachhead was established. If not, merely by holding for a comparatively brief time, Saito's men might nevertheless set the stage for a decisive sea battle.

Saipan: The First Day¹

The final reports from underwater demolition teams were encouraging, for Kauffman's men had found the reef free of mines and the boat lanes clear of obstacles. As dawn approached, the Americans noted that flags, probably planted after the underwater reconnaissance, dotted the area between the reef and the invasion beaches. These markers, intended to assist Japanese gunners in shattering the assault, were probably helpful to the troops manning the beach defenses, but the artillery batteries, firing from the island interior, were so thoroughly registered and boasted such accurate

data that the pennants were unnecessary.² Whatever their tactical value, the flags served as a portent of the fierce battle that would begin on the morning of 15 June.

FORMING FOR THE ASSAULT

The transport groups carrying those members of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions who had not been crammed into the LSTs took station off Saipan at 0520. Two transport divisions steamed toward Tanapag Harbor to prepare for the demonstration to be conducted by the 2d and 24th Marines along with the orphaned battalion, 1/29. The other vessels, however, waited some 18,000 yards off Charan Kanoa. At 0542, Admiral Turner flashed the signal to land the landing force at 0830, but he later postponed H-Hour by 10 minutes.

The preparatory bombardment continued in all its fury as the LSTs approached Saipan and began disgorging their LVTs. Smoke billowed upward from the verdant island, but a short distance seaward, the morning sun, its rays occasionally blocked by scattered clouds, illuminated a gentle sea. Neither wind, waves, nor unforeseen currents impeded the launching of the tractors or the lowering of landing craft.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material for this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv Op Rpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; 2d Mar SAR, Saipan, hereafter *2d Mar SAR*; 6th Mar SAR (Saipan), dtd 18Jul44, hereafter *6th Mar SAR*; 8th Mar SAR, dtd 20Jul44, hereafter *8th Mar SAR*; 23d Mar Final AR, Saipan, dtd 6Sep44, hereafter *23d Mar AR*; 24th Mar Final Rpt on Saipan Op, dtd 28Aug44, hereafter *24th Mar Rpt*; 24th Mar Small URpts, dtd 5May45; 25th Mar Final Rpt, Saipan Op, dtd 18Aug44, hereafter *25th Mar Rpt*; 1/8 Rpt on Ops, Saipan, dtd 17Jul44, hereafter *1/8 OpRpt*; 2/23 Final Rpt (Saipan), n.d., hereafter *2/23 Rpt*; 3/23 Rpt of Saipan Op, dtd 10Jul44, hereafter *3/23 OpRpt*; 2/24 Narrative of Battle of Saipan, 15Jun-9Jul44, n.d., hereafter *2/24 Narrative*; 1/25 Rpt on Saipan, dtd 19Aug44, hereafter *1/25 Rpt*; 3/25 Cbt Narrative of Saipan Op, n.d., hereafter *3/25 Narrative*; 3/25 Saipan Saga, n.d., hereafter *3/25 Saga*; Cowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*; Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas*.

² LtCol Wendell H. Best ltr to CMC, dtd 8Jan50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 45. No copy of this letter has been found.

Nearest the beaches that morning were the two battleships, two cruisers, and six destroyers charged with the final battering of the defenses which the Marines would have to penetrate. Beyond these warships, some 5,500 yards from shore, the LSTs carrying the assault elements of both divisions paused to set free their amphibian tractors. Control craft marked by identifying flags promptly took charge of the LVTs and began guiding them into formation. Farthest out to sea were the landing ships that carried field artillery and antiaircraft units and the LSDs that had ferried to Saipan the tank battalions of both divisions.

As the landing craft swarmed toward the line of departure, their movement was screened by salvos from certain of the fire-support units. Other warships lashed out at those areas from which the enemy might fire into the flanks of the landing force. Agingan Point and Afetna Point shuddered under the impact of 14-inch shells, while to the north, the *Maryland* hurled 16-inch projectiles into Mutcho Point and Maniagassa Island. The naval bombardment halted as scheduled at 0700 for a 30-minute aerial attack. When the planes departed, Admiral Hill, the designated commander of the landing phase, assumed control of the fire support ships blasting the invasion beaches. The naval guns then resumed firing, raising a pall of dust and smoke that made aerial observation of the southwestern corner of Saipan almost impossible.³

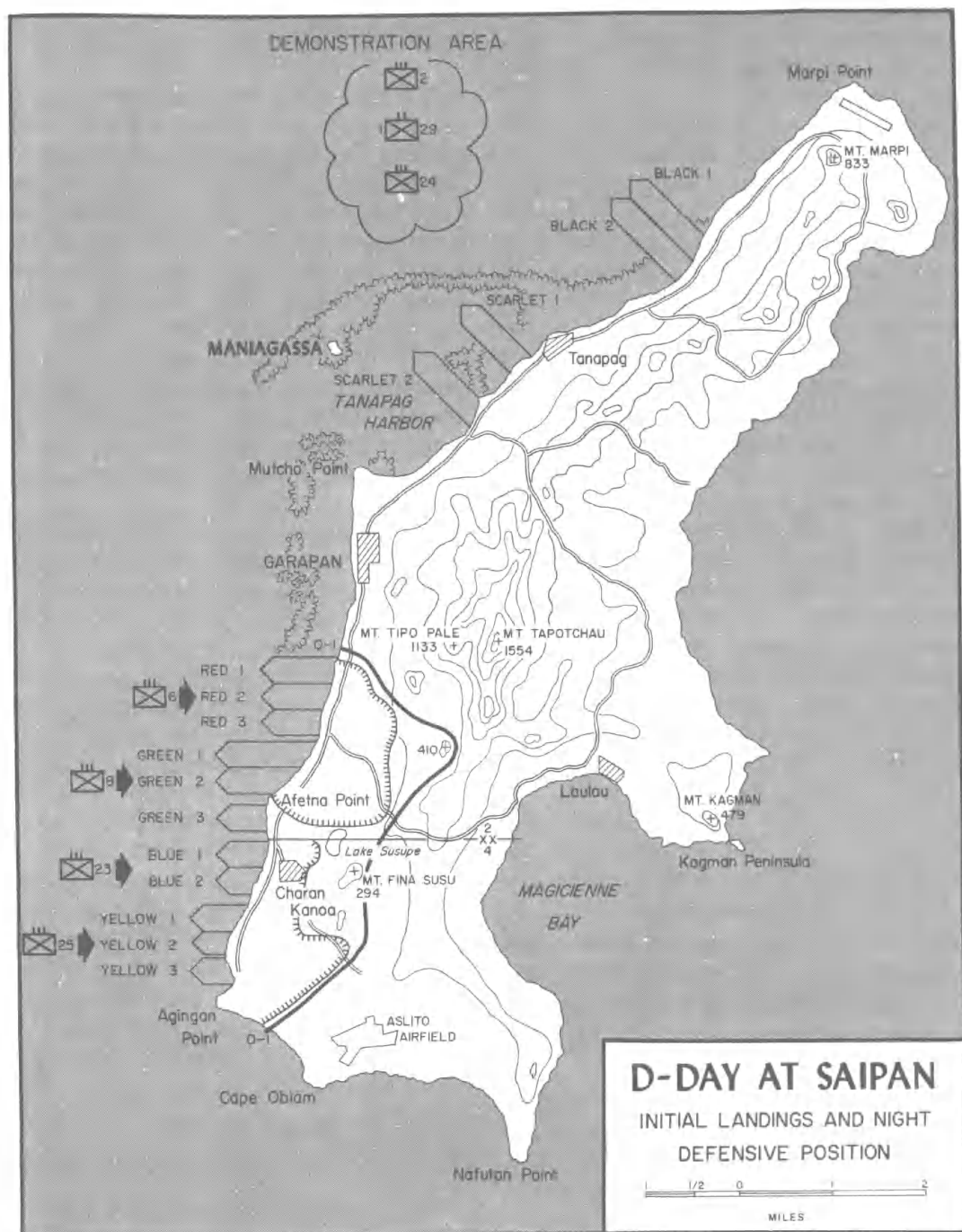
³ "Control of the fire support ships reverted to Adm Turner at 0910, following the termination of the 'landing phase.' Thereafter, the

At the line of departure, 4,000 yards from the smoke-shrouded beaches, 96 LVTs, 68 armored amphibian tractors, and a dozen control vessels were forming the first wave. These craft were posted to the rear of a line of 24 LCI gunboats. The remaining waves formed seaward of the line of departure to await the signal to advance toward the dangerous shores. Beyond the lines of tractors, the boats carrying reserve units maneuvered into position for their journey to the transfer area just outside the reef, where they would be met by tractors returning from the beaches. The LSTs assigned to the artillery units prepared to launch their DUKWs and LVTs, while the tank-carrying LCMs got ready to wallow forth from the LSDs. The control boats organizing these final waves rode herd on their charges to insure that the beachhead, once gained, could be rapidly reinforced.

At 0812, the first wave was allowed to slip the leash and lunge, motors roaring, toward shore. Ahead of these LVTs were the LCI(G)s which would pass through the line of supporting warships to take up the hammering of the beaches. Within the wave itself, armored amphibians stood ready to thunder across the reef and then begin their own flailing of the beaches. Overhead were the aircraft selected to make the final strike against the shoreline.

To the left of Afetna Point, looking inland from the line of departure, Gen-

control of fire support remained with Adm Turner except during periods of darkness when Adm Turner retired to the eastward of Saipan with ships not actually being unloaded." *Hill comments Saipan.*



MAP 16

R. F. STIBIL

eral Watson's 2d Marine Division, two regiments abreast, surged toward the Red and Green Beaches. Farthest left was the 6th Marines, commanded by Colonel James P. Riseley. The assault battalions of the regiment were to storm two 600-yard segments of the coast labeled Red 2 and Red 3. On Riseley's flank, beyond a 150-yard gap, was Colonel Clarence R. Wallace's 8th Marines, also landing on a 1,200-yard, two-battalion front. Included in the 8th Marines zone, divided into Beaches Green 1 and 2, was the northern half of Afetna Point. To the right of General Watson's troops lay 800 yards of comparatively untroubled ocean, but off Charan Kanoa the seas were churned white by the LVTs carrying General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division. Next to the gap, within which two fire-support ships were rifling high explosives into the island, was the 23d Marines, under the command of Colonel Louis R. Jones. Separated by a lane of 100 yards from Jones' two assault battalions were the two battalions that were leading Colonel Merton J. Batchelder's 25th Marines toward its objective. The 23d Marines was to seize Beaches Blue 1 and 2, while the 25th Marines crossed Yellow 1 and 2. The frontage assigned each battalion was 600 yards. The right limit of Yellow 3, southernmost of the beaches, lay a short distance north of Agingan Point. (See Map 16.)

These two divisions were Admiral Turner's right hand, his knockout punch. As he delivered this blow, he feinted with his left hand, the units that had been sent toward Tanapag Harbor.

THE TANAPAG DEMONSTRATION

Since 14 June, two old battleships, a cruiser, and four destroyers had been shelling the coastline from Garapan to Marpi Point. While the assault waves were forming off Charan Kanoa on the morning of the 15th, the transports lying off the entrance to Tanapag Harbor began lowering their landing craft. Except for the intelligence section of the 2d Marines, no troops embarked in these boats, which milled about approximately 5,000 yards from shore and then withdrew. By 0930, the craft were being hoisted on board the transports.

The maneuvering of the landing craft drew no response from Japanese guns, nor did observers notice any reinforcements being rushed into the threatened sector. A prisoner captured later in the campaign, an officer of the *43d Division* intelligence section, stated that the Japanese did not believe that the Marines would land at Tanapag Harbor, for on D minus 1 the heaviest concentrations of naval gunfire, as well as the bulk of the propaganda leaflets, had fallen in the vicinity of Charan Kanoa. The enemy, though, was not absolutely certain that he had correctly diagnosed Admiral Turner's intentions, so the *135th Infantry Regiment* was not moved from the northern sector.⁴ Admiral Turner's demonstration had immobilized a portion of the Saipan garrison, but it had not forced the Japanese to weaken the

⁴NTLF Spl Interrogation of Maj Kiyoshi Yoshida, IJA, dtd 11Jul44, app I to NTLF G-2 Rpt, pt II, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

concentration of troops poised to defend the southwestern beaches.

THE LANDINGS

Although the demonstration drew no fire, the enemy reacted violently to the real landing. A few shells burst near the line of departure as the LVTs were starting toward shore, but this enemy effort seemed feeble in comparison to the American bombardment which was then reaching its deafening climax. Warships hammered the beaches until the tractors were within 300 yards of shore, and concentrated on Afetna Point until the troops were even closer to the objective. Carrier planes joined in with rockets, 100-pound bombs, and machine gun fire when the first wave was 800 yards from its goal. The pilots, who continued their attacks until the Marines were ashore, carefully maintained a 100-yard safety zone between the point of impact of their weapons and the advancing LVTs.

Bombs, shells, and rockets splintered trees, gouged holes in Saipan's volcanic soil, and veiled the beaches in smoke and dust. The scene was impressive enough, but one newspaper correspondent nonetheless scrawled in his notebook: "I fear all this smoke and noise does not mean many Japs killed."⁵ The newspaperman was correct. From the midst of the seeming inferno, the Japanese were preparing to fight back.

As soon as the tractors thundered across the reef, they were greeted by

the fires of automatic cannon, antiboat guns, artillery pieces, and mortars. To the men of the 2d Marine Division it seemed that the shells were bursting "in an almost rhythmical patter, every 25 yards, every 15 seconds . . ."⁶ Japanese artillery units had planned to lavish 15 percent of their ammunition on the approaching landing craft and an equal amount on the beaches.⁷ Some of these projectiles were bound to find their mark. Here and there an LVT became a casualty. Such a victim "suddenly stood on end and then sank quivering under a smother of smoke. Bloody Marines twisted on its cramped deck, and in the glass-hatched driver's cabin another Marine slumped among the stained levers."⁸ In spite of their losses, the assault waves pressed forward, and by 0843 the first of the troops were ashore.

The 2d Marine Division, bound for the beaches on the left, landed somewhat out of position. Since control craft could not cross the reef, the LVTs were on their own during the final approach. Drivers found it difficult to maintain direction in the face of deadly fire, and a strong northerly current, undetected by the previous day's reconnaissance, further complicated their task. Commander Kauffman's underwater scouts had landed during different tidal conditions, so they did not encounter the treacherous current. Thus, the drift of sea, the inability of control vessels to surmount the reef, and the Japanese fusillade combined to

⁵ Robert Sherrod, *On to Westward: War in the Central Pacific* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1945), p. 47.

⁶ Johnston, *Follow Me!*, p. 179.

⁷ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9,604, Saipan ArtyPlan, n.d.

⁸ Johnston, *Follow Me!*, p. 179.

force the division to land too far to the left.

The 6th Marines was scheduled to cross Red 2 and 3, but 2/6, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray, and Lieutenant Colonel John W. Easley's 3/6 came ashore some 400 yards north of their goals, arriving on Red 1 and 2 respectively. In the zone of the 8th Marines, the situation was more serious. Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe's 2/8 and 3/8, under Lieutenant Colonel John C. Miller, Jr., landed on Green 1, some 600 yards from the regimental right boundary. Since the enemy had dropped a curtain of fire over the beaches, this accidental massing of troops contributed to the severe losses suffered during the day.

The 4th Marine Division landed as planned, with 3/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Cosgrove, and 2/23, under Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Dillon, seizing footholds on Blue 1 and 2, while Lieutenant Colonel Lewis C. Hudson's 2/25 and Lieutenant Colonel Hollis U. Mustain's 1/25 landed on Yellow 1 and 2. Once ashore, the attached LVTs and armored amphibians were to have fanned out to overrun Agingan Point, Charan Kanoa, and the ridge line some 2,000 yards inland of the coast. Enemy fire, however, prevented the coordinated thrust upon which General Schmidt had counted. Portions of the division advanced as far as the ridges, but other units were forced to abandon their tractors at the beaches.⁹ All along

the western beaches, the attack was losing its momentum. The next few hours could prove critical.

THE FIGHT FOR THE RED BEACHES.

During the planning of the Saipan operation, General Watson had expressed doubts concerning the soundness of the Northern Troops and Landing Force scheme of maneuver. The Commanding General, 2d Marine Division, did not believe that the LVTs could scale the embankments, thread their way through the rocks, or penetrate the swamps that in many places barred the exits from the beaches. Instead of having the tractors advance to the 0-1 Line, he wanted the LVT(A)s to move a short distance inland and keep the defenders pinned down while the first wave of LVTs cleared the beaches and discharged their troops. Succeeding waves would halt on the beaches, unload, and return to the transfer area. Watson was convinced that the tractors should not attempt to advance beyond the railroad line running northward from Charan Kanoa. General Holland Smith accepted these suggestions and permitted the 2d Marine Division to attack on foot from the railroad to 0-1. General Schmidt, however, chose to rely on his LVTs to execute the original scheme of maneuver in his division zone.

ese resistance but rather "to our inexperience in this type of assault, compounded by inadequate preparations, particularly in ensuring the coordinated movement of troop-carrying LVTs with the supporting LVT(A)s." Col Victor A. Croizat ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 5Mar63.

⁹ An LVT battalion commander attributed the lack of success of this use of tractors as combat vehicles ashore not so much to Japan-

That General Watson obtained a modification of the plan was fortunate, for intense enemy fire and forbidding terrain halted the tractors near the beaches. On Red 1 and 2, the initial thrust of the 6th Marines stalled about 100 yards inland. The captured strip of sand was littered with the hulks of disabled tractors. Here the wounded lay amid the bursting shells to await evacuation, while their comrades plunged into the thicket along the coastal highway.

For the most part, the Marines were fighting an unseen enemy. A Japanese tank, apparently abandoned, lay quiet until the assault waves had passed by and then opened fire on Lieutenant Colonel William K. Jones' 1/6, the regimental reserve, as that unit was coming ashore. Rounds from a rocket launcher and rifle grenades permanently silenced the tank and killed its occupants. From the smoke-obscured ground to the front of 3/6, a machine gun poured grazing fire into the battalion lines. Equally impersonal, and perhaps more deadly, were the mortar and artillery rounds called down upon the advancing Marines by observers posted along the Japanese-held ridges that formed the 0-1 Line.

Occasionally, small groups of Japanese from the *136th Infantry Regiment* suddenly emerged from the smoke, but the enemy preferred mortar, artillery, and machine gun fires to headlong charges. A few minutes after 1000, as Colonel Riseley was establishing his regimental command post on Red 2, between 15 and 25 Japanese suddenly materialized and began attacking southward along the beach. The bold thrust accomplished nothing, for the

enemy soldiers were promptly cut down.

Light armor from Colonel Takashi Goto's *9th Tank Regiment* made two feeble counterattacks against the 6th Marines. At noon, two tanks rumbled forth from their camouflaged positions to the front of 2/8 and started southward along the coastal road. Evidently the tank commanders were bewildered by the smoke, for they halted their vehicles within Marine lines. The hatch of the lead tank popped open, and a Japanese thrust out his head to look for some familiar landmark. Before the enemy could orient himself, Marine rocket launcher teams and grenadiers opened fire, promptly destroying both tanks. An hour later, three tanks attempted to thrust along the boundary between the 1st and 2d Battalions. Two of the vehicles were stopped short of the Marine positions, but the third penetrated to within 75 yards of Colonel Riseley's command post before it was destroyed.

The first few hours had been costly for Riseley's 6th Marines. By 1300, an estimated 35 percent of the regiment had been wounded or killed. Lieutenant Colonel Easley, though wounded, retained command over 3/6 for a time. Lieutenant Colonel Murray, whose injuries were more serious, turned 2/6 over to Major Howard J. Rice. Rice, in turn, was put out of the fight when, for the second time within five hours, a mortar round struck the battalion command post. Lieutenant Colonel William A. Kengla, who was accompanying the unit as an observer, took over until Major LeRoy P. Hunt, Jr., could come ashore.

In spite of the losses among troops and

leaders alike, the attack plunged onward. By 1105, the shallow initial beachhead had been expanded to a maximum depth of 400 yards. Twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Colonel Jones' 1/6 was ordered to pass through 3/6, which had been severely scourged by machine gun fire, and attack to the 0-1 Line, where it would revert to reserve by exchanging places with the units it had just relieved. This planned maneuver could not be carried out. The 1st Battalion could not gain the ridge line, and as the 6th Marines moved forward, the regimental frontage increased until all three battalions were needed on line.

During the day's fighting, a gap opened between the 6th and 8th Marines. Colonel Riseley's troops, manning a dangerously thin line and weary from their efforts, could extend their right flank no farther. Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines, which had undergone a similar ordeal, was in much the same condition.

THE GREEN BEACHES AND AFETNA POINT

The key terrain feature in the zone of the 8th Marines was Afetna Point which straddled the boundary between the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions. Since the company charged with capturing Afetna Point would have to attack toward the flank of General Schmidt's division, about half the unit was issued shotguns. These short-range weapons would not be as dangerous as M1s to friendly troops, and their wide patterns of dispersion would make up for their comparative inaccuracy. The attackers, Marines of Company G,

also carried their regularly assigned weapons for use after the point had been secured.

While coming ashore, Wallace's command had suffered "miraculously few LVT casualties"¹⁰ in spite of the ponderous barrage falling on and near the beaches. Both assault battalions, Crowe's 2/8 and Miller's 3/8, landed on the same beach, Green 1, and their component units became intermingled. In the judgment of the regimental commander, "If it had not been for the splendid discipline of the men and junior officers, there would have been utter confusion."¹¹ The various commanders, however, could not be certain of the exact location and composition of their organizations.

After a brief pause to orient themselves, the companies began fanning out for the attack. On the right, Company G of Crowe's battalion, its flank resting upon the Charan Kanoa airstrip, pushed southward along Green 2 toward Afetna Point. The advance was bitterly opposed. Japanese riflemen fired across the narrow runway into the exposed flank of the company until they were killed or driven off by Marine mortars and machine guns. On the opposite flank were emplaced nine antiboat guns. Fortunately for Company G, the Japanese gunners doggedly followed their orders to destroy the incoming landing craft, so the Marines were able to attack these emplacements from the rear. By darkness, when the company dug in for the night, all but two of the gun positions had been overrun, and all of Green

¹⁰ *8th Mar SAR*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

2, including the northern half of Afetna Point, was in American hands. In his report of the Saipan operation, Colonel Wallace expressed his belief that because of the confused landing, the capture of the point was delayed by 24 hours.

While one company was battling to join forces with the 4th Marine Division and secure use of the boat channel that led to Green 3, the rest of 2/8 was advancing toward the marsh extending northward from Lake Susupe. Elements of the battalion crossed the swamp, only to discover they were isolated, and had to fall back to establish a line along the firm ground to the west. On the left, 3/8 pushed directly inland from Green 1.

The regimental reserve, 1/8, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence C. Hays, Jr., was ordered ashore at 0950. One of Hays' companies was sent toward the airstrip to protect the left flank of the unit attacking Afetna Point. The two remaining rifle companies were committed along the boundary between the 2d and 3d battalions.

The next landing team to reach the Green Beaches was Lieutenant Colonel Guy E. Tannyhill's 1/29, the division reserve. Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill's Marines, who had taken part in the feint off Tanapag, came ashore early in the afternoon and were attached to the 8th Marines. Company B was ordered to seal a gap in the lines of 2/8, but the reinforcing unit became lost, and Company A was sent forward in its place. This second attempt was thwarted by Japanese forward observers who promptly called for artillery concentrations which

halted the Marines short of the front lines. While the men of Company A were seeking cover from the deadly shells, Company B found its way into position to close the opening.

The 8th Marines had battled its way as far inland as the swamps. On the left, the opening between Wallace's regiment and the 6th Marines was covered by fire. The actual lines of the 8th Marines began in the vicinity of the enemy radio station near the regimental left boundary, continued along the western edge of the swamp, and then curved sharply toward Afetna Point. In carving out this beachhead, the regiment had suffered about the same percentage of casualties as had the 6th Marines. Because of the intermingling of the assault battalions, Colonel Wallace could not at the time make an accurate estimate of his losses. The problem of reorganizing 2/8 and 3/8 was complicated by the grim resistance and the loss of both battalion commanders. Lieutenant Colonels Crowe and Miller had been wounded seriously enough to require evacuation from the island. Command of 2/8 passed to Major William C. Chamberlain, while Major Stanley E. Larson took the reins of the 3d Battalion.

CHARAN KANOA AND BEYOND

South of Afetna Point and Charan Kanoa pier lay the beaches assigned to Colonel Jones' 23d Marines. At Blue 1, eight LVTs, escorted by three armored amphibians and carrying members of Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove's 3/23, bolted forward along the only road leading beyond Charan Kanoa. The column exchanged shots with Japanese



FIRE TEAM member dashes across fire-swept open ground past a dud naval shell as Marines advance inland from Saipan beaches. (USMC 83010)



JAPANESE MEDIUM TANKS knocked out during the night counterattack on 17 June at Saipan. (USN 80-G-287376)

snipers who were firing from the ditches over which the highway passed, but it encountered no serious resistance in reaching Mount Fina Susu astride the 0-1 Line. The troops dismounted and established a perimeter atop the hill, a position exposed to direct fire from Japanese cannon and machine guns as well as to mortar barrages. The LVT(A)s, which mounted flat-trajectory weapons that might have aided the unit mortars in silencing enemy machine guns, halted at the base of the hill. No friendly units were within supporting distance on either flank, but the Marines managed to foil periodic attempts to infiltrate behind them. After dark, the defenders of Fina Susu were ordered to abandon their perimeter and withdraw to the battalion lines.

A similar breakthrough occurred at Blue 2, where five LVT(A)s and a trio of troop-carrying tractors followed the Aslito road all the way to 0-1. Again, the remainder of the battalion, in this case Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23, was stalled a short distance inland. The advanced outpost had to be recalled that evening.

The 23d Marines was unable to make a coordinated drive to the 0-1 Line. In the north, the Lake Susupe swamps stalled forward progress, and to the south a steep incline, rising between four and five feet from the level beaches but undetected by aerial cameras, halted the tractors. Because of the gap between divisions, the regimental reserve came ashore early in the day to fill out the line as the beachhead was enlarged. At 1055, 1/23, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Haas, landed and moved into an assembly area 300 yards inland of Blue 1. The

beachhead, however, did not expand as rapidly as anticipated, so the battalion spent the morning standing by to protect the left flank or reinforce the front. After sundown, Haas' troops were ordered to relieve Cosgrove's 3d Battalion.

Although few men actually gained the 0-1 Line, the 23d Marines nevertheless managed to gain a firm hold on the Blue Beaches, in spite of the violent fire and formidable natural obstacles which it encountered. Japanese mortar crews and cannoneers created havoc among the amphibian tractors which were attempting to find routes through either the swamp or the embankment. Yet, the Marines cleared the beaches to battle their way toward the ridges beyond. The ruins of Charan Kanoa were overrun and cleared of snipers. A consolidated beachhead some 800 yards in depth was wrested from a determined enemy. The 23d Marines was ashore to stay.

ACTION ON THE RIGHT FLANK

Agingan Point, south of the beaches upon which Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines landed, was a thorn in the regimental flank throughout the morning of D-Day. On Yellow 1, the beach farthest from the point, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 landed amid a barrage of high explosives. Approximately half of the LVTs reached the railroad embankment, which at this point ran diagonally inland between 500 and 700 yards from the coastline. LVT(A)s from the Army's 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion spearheaded the drive, pushing steadily forward in spite of small arms fire from the eastern side

of the rail line. These Japanese riflemen fell back, but artillery pieces and dual-purpose antiaircraft guns kept pumping shells into the advanced position. A bypassed pair of enemy mortars now joined in the bombardment. Since no friendly troops were nearby, Navy planes were called in to destroy the weapons.

To the south, the assault waves of Lieutenant Colonel Mustain's 1/25 were stopped a dozen yards past the beach. Enfilade fire from Agingan Point inflicted many casualties and prevented the survivors from moving forward. LVTs of the Army's 773d Amphibian Tractor Battalion barely had room to land the succeeding waves. Since bursting shells were churning the narrow strip of sand, the tractor drivers retreated as quickly as they could, sometimes departing before communications gear and crew-served weapons and their ammunition could be completely unloaded.

Focal point of enemy resistance was Agingan Point, a maze of weapons positions, and the patch of woods adjacent to that promontory. About 800 yards to Mustain's front, four or more artillery pieces slammed shells directly into the crowded beachhead. Gradually, however, the Marines worked their way forward, finally reaching 0-1 late in the afternoon.

At 0930, the Japanese made their first attempt to hurl 1/25 into the sea. While troops advanced across the ridge that marked the 0-1 Line, another enemy force attacked from Agingan Point in an effort to roll up the narrow beachhead. The battalion commander called for air strikes and naval gunfire concentrations which ended the threat

for the time being. The defenders, however, persisted in their efforts. Early in the afternoon, tanks from the 4th Tank Battalion joined Mustain's infantrymen in wiping out two Japanese companies, thus crushing the strongest counterattack of the day against the division flank.

Immediately upon landing, Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers' 3/25, the regimental reserve, sent reinforcements to Mustain. In the confusion of landing, portions of two rifle companies, instead of one complete company, were directed toward Agingan Point. The remainder of the reserve moved forward, mopping up in the wake of the advancing assault battalions. About 700 yards inland, Chambers' men took cover along the railroad embankment. From the comparative safety of this position additional reinforcements were despatched to Agingan Point, where 1/25 had by now seized the initiative from the elements of the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* that had been posted there.

Progress on the southern flank was slow, for a powerful enemy contingent occupied the point. Like the Eniwetok Island garrison, these soldiers had dug and carefully camouflaged numerous spider holes. The defenders waited until a fire team had passed them, then emerged from concealment to take aim at the backs of the Marines. One of the companies detached from Chambers' battalion reported killing 150 Japanese during the afternoon.

In spite of the battering it had received from artillery located in the island's interior, the 25th Marines made the deepest penetration, over 2,000 yards, of the day's fighting. Its

battalions had reached the 0-1 Line throughout the regimental zone, but an enemy pocket, completely isolated from the main body, continued to cling to the tip of Agingan Point. Both divisions had gained firm holds on the western beaches.

*SUPPORTING WEAPONS AND LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS*¹²

After the preliminary bombardment had ended, ships and aircraft continued to support both divisions. Planes remained on station throughout the day. Once the liaison parties ashore had established radio contact with the agencies responsible for coordinating and controlling their missions, the pilots began attacking mortar and artillery positions as well as reported troop concentrations.

Warships played an equally important role in supporting the Marines. From the end of the preparatory shelling until the establishment of contact with the battalions they were to support, the fire-support units blasted targets of opportunity. Subsequent requests from shore fire control parties were checked against calls for air strikes to avoid duplication of effort and the possible destruction of low-flying planes. Perhaps the most strik-

ing demonstration of the effectiveness of naval gunfire in support of the day's operations ashore was the work of the battleship *Tennessee* and three destroyers in helping to halt the first counter-attack against Mustain's troops.

The 2d Tank Battalion, commanded by Major Charles W. McCoy, and the 4th Tank Battalion, under Major Richard K. Schmidt, also assisted the riflemen in their drive eastward. Armor from McCoy's battalion crawled from the LCMs, plunged into the water at the reef edge, and passed through the curtain of shellfire that barred the way to Green 1. Since the enemy still held Afetna Point, the boat channel leading to Green 3 could not be used as planned. The last tank lumbered ashore at 1530, 2½ hours after the first of the vehicles had nosed into the surf. One company of 14 Sherman medium tanks helped shatter the positions blocking the approaches to Afetna Point. A total of eight tanks were damaged during the day, but seven of these were later repaired.

Heavy swells, which mounted during the afternoon, helped complicate the landing of the 4th Tank Battalion. Company A started toward Blue 2, but en route the electrical systems of two tanks were short-circuited by seawater. Another was damaged after landing. Four of the 14 Shermans of Company B survived shells and spray to claw their way onto the sands of Blue 1. Six tanks of the company were misdirected to Green 2, but only one actually reached its destination, the rest drowned out in deep water; the sole survivor was promptly commandeered by the 2d Tank Battalion. Company C, which landed on Yellow 2 without

¹² Additional sources for this section include: 10th Mar SAR (incl Bn SARs), dtd 22Jul44, hereafter *10th Mar SAR*; 14th Mar Final Rpt, Saipan Op, dtd 31Aug44, hereafter *14th Mar Rpt*; 20th Mar Final Rpt, n.d., hereafter *20th Mar Rpt*; 1/13 Observer's Rpt, Saipan, dtd 13Jul44; 2/18 Narrative Account of Saipan Op, dtd 21Jul44, hereafter *2/18 Narrative*; 4th TkBn CbtRpt (incl CoRpts), dtd 20Aug44.

losing a single tank, supported the advance of Dillon's 2/23. Company D landed 10 of its 18 flame-throwing light tanks, but these machines were held in an assembly area. As far as the 4th Division tankers were concerned, the crucial action of the day was the smashing of the afternoon counterthrust against 1/25.

Two 75mm pack howitzer battalions landed on D-Day to support General Watson's division. Lieutenant Colonel Presley M. Rixey's 1/10 went into position to the rear of the 6th Marines, while the 2d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George R. E. Shell, crossed the airstrip in order to aid the 8th Marines. In crossing the runway, Shell's men were spotted by the enemy, but the ensuing counterbattery fire did not destroy any of their howitzers. Colonel Raphael Griffin established his regimental command post before dark, but none of the 105mm battalions were landed.

South of the 2d Marine Division beachhead, all five battalions of Colonel Louis G. DeHaven's 14th Marines landed on the Blue and Yellow beaches. The 2d Battalion had the greatest difficulty in getting ashore, for its elements were scattered along three different beaches. During reorganization on Blue 2, casualties and losses of equipment to both the sea and hostile fire forced the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel George B. Wilson, Jr., to merge his three 75mm batteries into two units. The other pack howitzer battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Harry J. Zimmer's 1/14, was forced to disassemble its weapons and land from LVTs, as the DUKWs that were scheduled to carry the unit failed to return as plan-

ned after landing a 105mm battalion. The only firing position available to 1/14 on Yellow 1 was a scant 100 yards from the water. Firing from Yellow 2 was 3/14, a 105mm battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. MacFarlane, the first element of the 14th Marines to go into action on Saipan. Immediately after landing on Blue 2, Lieutenant Colonel Carl A. Youngdale's 4th Battalion lost four 105s to Japanese mortar fire, but the artillerymen managed to repair the damaged weapons. From its positions on Blue 2, 5/14, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Douglas E. Reeve, temporarily silenced a Japanese gun that was pounding the beachhead from a range of 1,500 yards.

Supplying the landing force did not prove as difficult at Saipan as it had at Tarawa. By having certain of the LVTs dump boxes of rations and medical supplies, cases of ammunition, and cans of water onto the beaches as the later waves were landing, supply officers were able to sustain the assault troops. Unlike the cargo handlers at Betio, the Saipan shore parties soon had sufficient room to carry out their tasks. Early in the afternoon, supplies began flowing from the transports, across the beaches, and to the advancing battalions. Japanese fire and a lack of vehicles, however, did handicap the D-Day supply effort.

Enemy artillery and mortar concentrations also endangered the lives of the wounded Marines who were waiting on the beaches for the tractors that would carry them out to sea. About 60 percent of the wounded were taken directly to the transports. Although no accurate accounting was made until 17

June, as many as 2,000 men may have been killed or wounded on D-Day.

THE SITUATION ASHORE: THE EVENING OF D-DAY

By darkness on D-Day, the two Marine divisions had succeeded in establishing themselves on the western coast of Saipan. Approximately half of the planned beachhead had been won, but the enemy still held the ridges that dominated captured segments of the coastal plain. The 2d Marine Division manned a line that stretched from the coast about one mile south of Garapan to the middle of Afetna Point. The maximum depth of the division beachhead was about 1,300 yards. Before dark, Colonel Walter J. Stuart had landed one battalion and part of another from his 2d Marines. These reserves provided added strength in the event of a counterattack. Also ashore was General Watson, who now commanded operations from a captured munitions dump inland of the coastal road on the boundary between Red 1 and Red 2. The cached explosives were removed during the night and following morning. (See Map 16.)

In the 4th Marine Division zone, those elements of the 23d Marines that had reached the 0-1 Line fell back some 800 yards during the night. After this adjustment, the front moved from the coastline 800 yards inland along the division boundary, turned south past Charan Kanoa, and then bulged eastward to 0-1. In the right half of General Schmidt's zone of action, a band of Japanese entrenched on Aginagan Point prevented the Marines from occupying all the territory west of the

critical ridge line. Colonel Franklin A. Hart's 24th Marines was ashore, with elements of its 1st Battalion committed between 2/23 and 2/25, while the rest of the regiment occupied assembly areas. General Schmidt had moved into a command post on Yellow 2.¹³

THE JAPANESE STRIKE BACK

As soon as American carrier planes had begun to hammer the Marianas in earnest, Admiral Toyada signaled the execution of *A-GO*. On 13 June, as it was starting northward from Tawi Tawi, Ozawa's task force encountered the submarine USS *Redfin*, which reported its strength, course, and speed. Another submarine, the USS *Flying Fish*, sighted Ozawa's ships on 15 June, as they were emerging from San Bernardino Strait between Samar and Luzon. The Japanese were by this time shaping an eastward course. On this day, the submarine USS *Seahorse* observed the approach of the warships diverted from Biak, but the enemy jammed her radio, and she was unable to report the sighting until 16 June.

Admiral Spruance was now aware that enemy carriers were closing on the Marianas. Japanese land-based planes also were active, as was proved by an unsuccessful attack upon a group of

¹³ General Schmidt recalled that several of his staff officers went ashore with him after dark and "after getting dug in, it was suddenly discovered that we were in a supply dump of bangalore torpedoes. We decided to get out quick. An armored vehicle was sent us and we arrived shortly in the temporary CP." Gen Harry Schmidt cmts on draft MS, dtd 4Jun63.

American escort carriers on the night of 15 June. After evaluation of the latest intelligence, Spruance decided on the following morning to postpone the Guam landings, tentatively set for 18 June, until the enemy carrier force had either retreated or been destroyed.

While Ozawa was steaming nearer, the Japanese on Saipan were preparing to carry out their portion of *A-GO*. As one member of the *9th Tank Regiment* confided to his diary, "Our plan would seem to be to annihilate the enemy by morning."¹⁴ First would come probing attacks to locate weaknesses in the Marine lines, then the massive counter-stroke designed to overwhelm the beachhead.

The heaviest blows delivered against General Watson's division were aimed at the 6th Marines. Large numbers of Japanese, their formations dispersed, eased down from the hills without feeling the lash of Marine artillery. The two howitzer battalions, all that the division then had ashore, were firing urgent missions elsewhere along the front and could not cover the avenue by which the enemy was approaching. The *California* received word of the movement and opened fire in time to help crush the attack. Before midnight, the Japanese formed a column behind their tanks in an effort to overwhelm the outposts of 2/6 and penetrate the battalion main line of resistance. Star shells blossomed overhead to illuminate the onrushing horde. Riflemen and machine gunners broke the attack, and the *California* secondary batteries caught the survivors as

they were reeling back. Although this first blow had been parried, the Japanese continued to jab at the perimeter.

At 0300, regimental headquarters received word that an attack had slashed through the lines of 3/6, but the company sent to block this penetration found the front intact. A similar report received some three hours later also proved false. The enemy, however, maintained his pressure until a platoon of medium tanks arrived to rout what remained of the battalion which the *136th Infantry Regiment* had hurled against the beachhead. In eight hours of intense fighting, the 6th Marines had killed 700 Japanese soldiers.

The 8th Marines was harassed throughout the night by attacks that originated in the swamps to its front. These blows, weak and uncoordinated, were repulsed with the help of fires from 2/10. The enemy did not employ more than a platoon in any of these ill-fated thrusts.

Throughout the sector held by General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division, the Japanese made persistent efforts to shatter the American perimeter. Approximately 200 of the enemy advanced from the shores of Lake Susupe, entered the gap between the divisions, and attempted to overwhelm 3/23. The battalion aided by Marine and Army shore party troops, held firm.

The 25th Marines stopped one frontal attack at 0330, but an hour later the Japanese, advancing behind a screen of civilians, almost breached the lines of the 1st Battalion. As soon as the Marines discovered riflemen lurking behind the refugees, they called 1/14 for artillery support. This unit, out of

¹⁴ JICPOA Item No. 10,238, Diary of Tokuzo Matsuya.

ammunition, passed the request to 3/14, which smothered the attack under a blanket of 105mm shells. The only withdrawal in the 25th Marines sector occurred when a Japanese shell set fire to a 75mm self-propelled gun. Since the flames not only attracted Japanese artillery but also touched off the ammunition carried by the burning vehicle, the Marines in the immediate area had to fall back about 200 yards.

The Japanese had been unable to destroy the Saipan beachhead, but the battle was just beginning. The *Thirty-first Army* chief of staff admitted on the morning of 16 June that

"the counterattack which has been carried out since the afternoon of the 15th has failed because of the enemy tanks and fire power." Yet, he remained undaunted. "We are reorganizing," his report continued, "and will attack again."¹⁵ While the battle raged ashore, an enemy fleet was bearing down on the Marianas. If all went as planned, Admiral Ozawa and General Saito might yet trap the American forces.

¹⁵ NTLF G-2, Tgs Sent and Received by Thirty-first Army Hq on Saipan, dtd 25Jul44, p. 4.

The Conquest of Southern Saipan¹

THE CAPTURE OF SOUTHERN SAIPAN

On the morning of 16 June, Admiral Spruance visited Admiral Turner's flagship, the *Rocky Mount*, to inform his principal subordinates how he intended to meet the threat posed by the approaching enemy fleet. Spruance wanted the vulnerable transports and other amphibious shipping to stand clear of Saipan until the Japanese carriers could be destroyed. General unloading over the western beaches was to stop at dusk on 17 June, after which transports that were not vital to the operation and all the LSTs would steam eastward from the island. If the cargo carried in any of the ships that had been withdrawn was later needed

by the landing force, the necessary vessels, carefully screened by warships, could be sent back to Saipan.²

Spruance left the aerial support of operations ashore to planes based on the escort carriers. All of Task Force 58, the faster escort carriers included, was to concentrate on defeating Ozawa's approaching battle fleet. Certain cruisers and destroyers were freed from their mission of protecting Admiral Turner's amphibious force so they could reinforce Admiral Spruance's striking force. Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf was to station his old battle-ships, along with their screen of cruisers and destroyers, about 25 miles west of Saipan to shatter a possible night attack by Japanese surface units.³ In order to detect the kind of surprise blow against which Oldendorf's giants were guarding, Navy patrol bombers flew westward from Eniwetok and, on the night of 17 June, began operating from

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *2d Mar SAR*; *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *10th Mar SAR*; *14 Mar Rpt*; *23d Mar AR*; *24th Mar Rpt*; *25th Mar Rpt*; *105th Inf OpRpt*, dtd 20Sep44 (WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.), hereafter *105th Inf OpRpt*; *106th Inf OpRpt*, n.d., hereafter *106th Inf OpRpt*; *165th Inf OpRpt*; *1/8 OpRpt*; *2/23 Rpt*; *2/23 OpRpt*; *2/24 Narrative*; *1/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Narrative*; *3/25 Saga*; *1/29 SAR*, dtd 1Sep44, hereafter *1/29 SAR*; Edmund G. Love, *The 27th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), hereafter *Love, 27th InfDiv History*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*.

² Admiral Hill, who remained in the unloading area off Saipan during this period, recalled that "each evening, after consultation with VAC, [he] informed Adm Turner what ships he desired at the anchorage at daylight the following day. In the main, this plan operated very well, and no serious shortages developed in supply to the three divisions ashore." *Hill comments Saipan*.

³ Units of Oldendorf's Covering Group could be recalled for specific fire support assignments for troops ashore and were so used in several instances during this deployment. *Ibid*.

off the west coast of Saipan. Spruance also ordered the transports carrying the Guam expedition to get clear of the Marianas and take up station east of their objective. The recapture of Guam could wait until the *Imperial Japanese Navy* had played its hand.

"Do you think the Japs will turn tail and run?" asked General Holland Smith as the meeting was coming to a close.

"No," Admiral Spruance answered, "not now. They are out for big game. If they had wanted an easy victory, they would have disposed of the relatively small force covering MacArthur's operation at Biak. But the attack on the Marianas is too great a challenge for the Japanese Navy to ignore."⁴

While Spruance's thoughts turned to the enemy ships advancing eastward toward him, Generals Watson and Schmidt plotted the conquest of the southern part of Saipan. The overall scheme of maneuver called for the two divisions to pivot on Red 1 to form a line stretching from the west coast, across the island, to a point just south of the Kagman Peninsula. While the 2d Marine Division held off any attacks from the vicinity of Mounts Tipo Pale and Tapotchau, the 4th Marine Division was to smash through to the shores of Magicienne Bay.

THE CAPTURE OF AFETNA POINT

On the morning of 16 June, Lieutenant Colonel Easley, wounded the day

⁴ Quoted in Gen Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 165. hereafter Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*.

before, turned command of 3/6 over to Major John E. Rentsch and was evacuated from the island. Major Hunt had by this time assumed command of 2/6 from Lieutenant Colonel Kengla, the observer who had temporarily replaced the wounded Major Rice. Strengthened by the arrival of its self-propelled 75mm guns and 37mm anti-tank weapons, Colonel Riseley's 6th Marines, the pivot for the entire landing force, spent the day mopping up the area it already had overrun. Fighting flared whenever Marines encountered Japanese die-hards, only to end abruptly once the enemy soldiers had been killed.

The 8th Marines zone also was quiet in comparison to the frenzy of D-Day. The 2d Battalion, however, saw sustained action while driving the enemy from Afetna Point and pushing toward Lake Susupe. At the point, the going was comparatively easy, for many of the defenders had either fled inland or been killed during the fruitless night counterattacks. By 0950, 2/8 had established contact with the 23d Marines at Charan Kanoa pier.

The company that had cleaned out Afetna Point then reverted to battalion reserve. Japanese artillery began relentlessly stalking the unit, even when it occupied positions screened from observers on the 0-1 ridges. Some days later the culprit was found, an enemy soldier who had been calling down concentrations from his post in one of the smokestacks that towered over the ruined Charan Kanoa sugar refinery.⁵

⁵ The commanding officer of the 23d Marines recalled that Japanese troops, who infiltrated from the north, repeatedly occupied this re-

While this one company was securing Afetna Point, and later dodging shell bursts, the remainder of the battalion advanced to the western edge of Lake Susupe.

D plus 1 also saw the further strengthening of General Watson's 2d Marine Division. The remainder of Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Nutting's 2/2 came ashore to serve for the time being with the 6th Marines. All of Lieutenant Colonel Arnold F. Johnston's 3/2 had landed on D-Day. Because of the volume of hostile fire that was erupting along the northern beaches, 1/2, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wood B. Kyle, was diverted to the zone of the 4th Marine Division. Northern Troops and Landing Force intended that the battalion serve with the 4th Marine Division, but Kyle learned only of the change of beaches when he reported to the control vessel. As a result, when his men landed, Kyle marched them north and rejoined the 2d Marine Division. Once the move had been made, NTLF decided that a return to 4th Division territory and control was undesirable and 1/2 remained with its parent regiment.

Originally scheduled to be supplied by parachute after the contemplated landing at Magicienne Bay, Kyle's battalion had placed its 81mm mortars and .30 caliber water-cooled machine guns on board an escort carrier. The torpedo planes that were sent to deliver the

finery, which controlled the boat channel off Green 3. He noted that the danger was finally eliminated by the mopup action of two companies of Army troops assigned to the shore party on the Yellow Beaches. MajGen Louis R. Jones ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 13Feb 63, hereafter *Jones ltr*.

weapons after the battalion had landed flew so low over the Charan Kanoa airstrip that the parachutes did not open completely. As a result, almost all the equipment was damaged. With his 2d Battalion attached to the 6th Marines and 1/2 presumably under control of the 4th Marine Division, Colonel Stuart had been assigned to command a composite force made up of 3/2 and 2/6. Since 2/6 had fought desperately to repel the previous night's counterattack, Stuart ordered the tired unit into reserve, relieving it with his other battalion.

The second day of the Saipan operation also saw the landing of two 105mm howitzer battalions of the 10th Marines. Late in the afternoon, the DUKWs carrying Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Jorgensen's 4/10 and Major William L. Crouch's 3/10 crossed Green 3. Jorgensen's battalion went into position near the radio station, while Crouch's unit prepared to fire from an area 200 yards inland from the southern limit of Green 2. The 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, detached from VAC Artillery, did not come ashore because adequate firing positions were not available. To the south, the arrival on the Blue Beaches of General Harper and the advance parties of all four XXIV Corps Artillery battalions gave promise of increasingly effective fire support as the battle progressed.

THE 4TH MARINE DIVISION BATTLES FORWARD

General Schmidt had decided that a strong effort in the center of his zone of action offered the best chance for success. Before launching his attack,

scheduled for 1230 on 16 June, the 4th Marine Division commanding general parceled out elements of Colonel Hart's 24th Marines in order to strengthen his position. The 3d Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander A. Vandegrift, Jr., was attached to Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines in order to shore up the right-hand portion of the division front, relieving the weary 1/25, while Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Rothwell's 2/24 moved into positions from which to protect the left flank. The remainder of the 24th Marines took over the center of the beach-head. As 1/24 was moving forward, mortar fragments claimed the life of Lieutenant Colonel Maynard C. Schultz, the battalion commander, who was replaced by his executive officer, Major Robert N. Fricke.

The artillery battalions which were to support the attack also came under enemy fire. Lieutenant Colonel Reeve of 5/14 reported that by 1730 on 16 June, all but two of his 105mm howitzers had been knocked out. "When I say 'knocked out,'" he continued, "I mean just that—trails blown off, recoil mechanism damaged, *etc.* By 1000, with the help of division ordnance and by completely replacing one or two weapons, we were back in business—full strength—12 guns." ⁶ Early in the morning 4/14 also came under accurate counterbattery fire. After the Marine cannoneers had blasted a 30-man patrol, hostile gunners retaliated by silencing one of the battalion's howit-

zers, killing or wounding every member of the crew.

Although Agingan Point was secured early in the day, the attack of the 4th Marine Division was not a complete success, for darkness found the enemy clinging stubbornly to a portion of the 0-1 Line. The longest gains were made on the right by the 25th Marines. While Vandegrift's attached unit moved forward, Mustain, commander of 1/25, released control of those elements of 3/25 that had been entrusted to the 1st Battalion on the previous day. Once his 3d Battalion had been restored as a team, Chambers sent tanks and infantrymen against pockets of resistance to his rear. The Marines silenced five machine guns and two howitzers, killing in the process some 60 Japanese.

When this task had been finished, Chambers lent assistance to 2/25, which was trying to destroy a quartet of antiaircraft guns located on the reverse slope of the 0-1 ridge. In spite of help from tanks and two of Chambers' rifle companies, Hudson's Marines could not dislodge the enemy, for the Japanese were able to place grazing fire along the crest. Still, the 25th Marines, with Vandegrift's attached battalion, was able to claw its way to within a half-mile of Aslito airfield. In the center and on the left, the 24th and 23d Marines fought a similar tank-infantry battle against equally resolute Japanese of the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*. The division front line by nightfall formed a crescent around the southern shore of Lake Susupe, bulged eastward almost to 0-1, crossed the critical ridge near the center of the zone of action, and continued to a point almost 1,000

⁶ LtCol Douglas E. Reeve, ltr to Maj Carl W. Hoffman, dtd 6Jan49, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 82. No copy of this letter has been found.

yards east of Agingan Point. (See Map 17.)

ADDITIONAL REINFORCEMENTS ⁷

Ozawa's appearance east of the Philippines caused Admiral Spruance to order the American transports to safer waters, a withdrawal that would begin at darkness on 17 June. General Holland Smith was thus presented the choice of either landing his Expeditionary Troops reserve at Saipan or allowing it to disappear over the eastern horizon. Since the fierce battle on D-Day had served notice that the conquest of Saipan would be a difficult task, he released General Ralph Smith's 27th Infantry Division, less one regiment and its supporting artillery battalion, to Northern Troops and Landing Force and then ordered one of the Army regimental combat teams to land at once.

During the night, the 165th Infantry went ashore, came under General Schmidt's control, and got ready to pass through 3/24 and extend the 4th Marine Division right flank during the next day's attack. The 105th Infantry would land on Holland Smith's order, while the 106th Infantry, formerly scheduled to join Southern Troops and Landing Force at Guam, remained afloat as Expeditionary Troops reserve. Three of the 27th Division field artillery battalions, the 105th, 106th, and 249th, were ordered to disembark and serve under the direction of XXIV Corps Artillery, and by the middle of

the following morning, all of them were ready for action. While these reinforcements were crossing the darkened beaches, an advance party from Northern Troops and Landing Force headquarters arrived to select a site for Holland Smith's command post.

THE TANK BATTLE ⁸

During daylight on 16 June, the 2d Marine Division had not engaged in the savage kind of fighting endured by the 4th Marine Division. Once darkness arrived, their roles were reversed, for General Saito chose to hurl the *9th Tank Regiment*, *136th Infantry Regiment*, and *1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force* at the northern half of the beachhead. Because of the gains which the Marines had made during the past two days, the Japanese general could not hope to crush General Watson's division at a single stroke. Instead of simply issuing orders to drive the Americans into the sea, Saito directed his troops first to recapture the site of the Saipan radio station, some 400 yards behind the lines held by the 6th Marines. Once this initial objective had been gained, the Japanese would promptly launch further blows that would bring the Americans to their knees.

⁸ Additional sources for this section include: CinCPac-CinCPOA Items Nos. 9304, 9th TkRegt O/B, dtd 15May44, 9983-9985, Thirty-first ArHq outgoing msg file, msg no. 1039, and 10531, Excerpts from a Notebook of FOs; LtCol William K. Jones memo to Dir DivPubInfo, n.d., subj: "Campaign for the Marianas, comments on"; Maj James A. Donovan, "Saipan Tank Battle," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 32, no. 10 (Oct48).

⁷ An additional source for this section is: 27th InfDiv G-3 Periodic Rpt, 16-17Jun44.

Colonel Goto's *9th Tank Regiment*, which boasted new medium tanks mounting 47mm guns as well as older light tanks, was to spearhead the effort, attacking westward directly toward the radio station. Two of Goto's companies and part of a third had been sent to Guam, but 3½ companies were on hand at Saipan. Although one of these units had been almost wiped out during the earlier fighting, Goto was able to muster about 44 tanks, most of them mediums.

On the heels of the tank attack, Colonel Yukimatsu Ogawa's *136th Infantry Regiment*, which already had suffered serious losses, was to attack toward Charan Kanoa. From the north, Lieutenant Commander Tatsue Karashima's *1st Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force* would advance from Garapan along the coastal road. Although Saito directed the naval unit to cooperate with his Army troops in the eventual capture of Charan Kanoa, he apparently was unable to impose his will on Admiral Nagumo. What was to have been a serious effort to penetrate the lines of the 2d Marines and push southward along the highway did not materialize. Colonel Stuart's regiment, subjected to scattered mortar fire, beat off "minor counterattacks"⁹ but encountered no real peril from the direction of Garapan. To the south, however, Japanese Army troops delivered a blow which, in the opinion of Lieutenant Colonel Jones of 1/6, "could have been fatal to the division's fighting efficiency."¹⁰

Before darkness, American aerial ob-

servers had spotted several enemy tanks in the area inland of the 2d Marine Division beachhead, so the troops were alert to the possibility of an armored attack. At 0330 on the morning of 17 June, the Marines of 1/6 heard the roaring of tank motors. Star shells illuminated the darkened valley from which the noise seemed to be coming, a company of Sherman medium tanks was alerted, and supporting weapons began delivering their planned fires. Within 15 minutes, the hostile tanks, with Ogawa's infantrymen clinging to them, began rumbling into the battalion sector.

"The battle," wrote Major James A. Donovan, Jr., executive officer of 1/6, "evolved itself into a madhouse of noise, tracers, and flashing lights. As tanks were hit and set afire, they silhouetted other tanks coming out of the flickering shadows to the front or already on top of the squads."¹¹ Marine 2.36-inch rocket launchers, grenade launchers, 37mm antitank guns, medium tanks, and self-propelled 75mm guns shattered the enemy armor, while rifle and machine gun fire joined mortar and artillery rounds in cutting down the accompanying foot soldiers.

Between 0300 and 0415, when the battle was most violent, 1/10 fired 800 75mm rounds in support of 1/6. The battalion fired another 140 shells between 0430 and 0620, as the action waned. Additional support came from a 4/10 battery of 105mm howitzers.

Although directed primarily at 1/6, the attack spilled over into the sector manned by 2/2, which was still

⁹ 2d MarDiv D-3 Rpt, 16-17Jun44.

¹⁰ Jones memo, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Donovan, "Saipan Tank Battle," *op. cit.*, p. 26.

attached to the 6th Marines. Here three of Goto's tanks were disabled. By 0700, the hideous din had ended all along the front, but the quiet of the battlefield was broken by the bark of M1 rifles as Marines hunted down survivors of the night's bitter clash. Atop a hill in front of Jones' battalion, a Japanese tank, smashed by naval gunfire as it attempted to escape, lay wreathed in black smoke. At least 24 of the 31 armored vehicles whose charred hulks now littered the area were destroyed while attempting to pierce the lines of 1/6.¹² "I don't think we have to fear Jap tanks any more on Saipan," remarked General Watson. "We've got their number."¹³ The Marines had handled their antitank weapons so effectively that only a handful of Goto's vehicles survived the massacre. These few tanks, however, would strike again before the battle ended.

The *136th Infantry Regiment* also suffered intensely at the hands of 1/6 and 2/2. Neither battalion estimated the number of Japanese killed on that hectic morning. Judging from reports made to division on the following evening, Colonel Ogawa must have lost about 300 men. The Japanese had suffered a bitter reverse. Commented the commanding officer of the *135th Infan-*

try Regiment in northern Saipan: "Despite the heavy blow we dealt the enemy, he is reinforcing his forces in the vicinity of Charan Kanoa. . . ." ¹⁴ Such was the epitaph to General Saito's counterattack.

In all but destroying the *9th Tank Regiment* and a 500-man detachment of infantry, 1/6 had suffered 78 casualties, more than one-third of a full-strength rifle company. The company from 2/2 that helped Jones' Marines shatter the attack lost 19 men killed and wounded. The battalions of the 10th Marines, whose positions had been carefully plotted during the day by Japanese observers, suffered many casualties, including the wounding of the commander of 2/10, Lieutenant Colonel Shell. The two battalions also lost a great deal of equipment to counterbattery fire. By dawn on 17 June, four of the 4th Battalion 105s were temporarily out of action, and only three of the 2d Battalion 75s were capable of firing.

In spite of these losses, which brought NTLF total casualties to approximately 2,500, the efficiency of the command was considered excellent. Now the two Marine divisions, aided by Colonel Gerard W. Kelley's 165th Infantry, would renew their efforts to break out from the coastal plain. While the 2d Marine Division sent the 2d and 6th Marines north toward Garapan and Tippo Pale and the 8th Marines eastward to 0-1, the 4th Marine Division and its attached Army regiment was to continue toward Aslito field.

¹² Because of the darkness and confusion, the troops involved could not accurately estimate the number of tanks they had destroyed. The tally made after the battle may have included some vehicles that were knocked out prior to the night attack.

¹³ Quoted in Robert Sherrod, *On to Westward, War in the Central Pacific* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1945), p. 68.

¹⁴ NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 13, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

17 JUNE: THE ATTACK OF THE 2d MARINE DIVISION

The attack planned for 0730 on 17 June called for the 2d Marines to extend their beachhead almost halfway to Garapan, while the 6th Marines fought its way to a line drawn south and slightly east from the base of 1,133-foot Mount Tipo Pale. The 8th Marines had the mission of advancing across the Lake Susupe marshes to seize the O-1 ridges to its front. A planned 90-minute preparation by aircraft, warships, and artillery batteries was within 15 minutes of completion when General Holland Smith directed General Watson to postpone the attack until 0930. Convinced that he did not have time to inform all his infantry units of the delay, Watson allowed the three regiments to surge forward.

Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines, composed at the time of 3/2 and 2/6, advanced 400 yards within three hours. Resistance continued very light, and by 1800 the unit was digging in at its objective, about 1,000 yards south of Garapan. One company of 2/6, the regimental reserve, was inserted on the right of 3/2 to insure contact with the 6th Marines. General Watson then released to Stuart's control a company from 1/2, the division reserve, and this unit was attached to 2/6.

The men of the 6th Marines had barely finished ferreting out the snipers left behind as the Japanese counterattack receded, when they began an attack of their own. The regiment fought its way upward to the foothills of Mount Tipo Pale. Since the Japanese within the 6th Marines zone of action had been mauled during

the night's fighting, the survivors could offer only slight resistance, but difficulty in maintaining contact with the 8th Marines slowed Colonel Riseley's command. By the time the objective had been captured, 1/6, 3/6, and 2/2 were on line, with the regimental scout-sniper platoon the only available reserve. To add strength to the position, Colonel Riseley received one company from 1/2.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines moved rapidly forward in the left of its zone of action, as the 1st and 3d Battalions seized their assigned portions of the disputed ridgeline. Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill's 1/29, however, soon found itself mired in the bog that extended northward from Lake Susupe. Japanese snipers lurking in the swamp killed or wounded many of the floundering Marines, while enemy troops firing from a hill on the O-1 Line and an adjacent grove of palm trees inflicted their share of the 80 casualties suffered by the battalion. Among those wounded and evacuated was Lieutenant Colonel Tannyhill, who was replaced during the afternoon by Lieutenant Colonel Rathvon McC. Tompkins.

No sooner had Tompkins arrived on the scene than four medium tanks came thundering along the one good road leading through the zone. He commandeered the Shermans, and their 75mm guns kept the defenders crouching in the trenches until Marine infantrymen could overwhelm the enemy and gain the crest. The tanks then rumbled up the hill to fire directly into a cave where a number of Japanese were holding out, killing the occupants. Although the hill itself was firmly in American hands, the nearby coconut

grove defied reduction. Whenever the battalion 81mm mortars took the stand of trees under fire, the Japanese responded with a torrent of bullets. To guard against a possible counterattack, four self-propelled 75mm guns were rushed onto the hill. No further advance was attempted that day.

On 17 June, the 2d Marine Division had almost doubled the area under its control. From a point on the coast 1,000 yards south of Garapan, the front curved inland past the approaches to Mount Tipo Pale, embraced the hard-won hill in the 8th Marines zone, and swung sharply toward Lake Susupe. The three regiments were in contact with one another, but a gap existed between divisions. To refuse the dangling flank, 2/8 dug in for the night facing generally to the south. (See Map 17.)

THE APPROACH TO ASLITO AIRFIELD

Two battalions of Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry landed before dawn of 17 June, passed through the lines of 3/24, and attacked toward Aslito field. Vandegrift's Marine battalion, although it had become division reserve, remained in position until midmorning, when Kelley's remaining battalion, 3/165, was safely ashore. Attacking with its 1st and 2d Battalions abreast, the Army regiment thrust forward against comparatively weak defenses. As the day wore on, Japanese opposition along the southern coast increased in ferocity. Near Cape Obiam, 1/165 inched its way to the crest of the ridge that barred access to the airfield, only to be driven back down the slope by a

determined counterattack. The battalion then paused for the night at the base of the ridge. Since this unit could advance no farther, Colonel Kelley halted 2/165 along the high ground just short of the Aslito runways. The 2d Battalion occupied a position that afforded excellent fields of fire and insured contact with 1/165 on the right. The regimental losses for the day's action totaled 15 killed and 57 wounded?

Just to the north, Colonel Batchelder of the 25th Marines sent a column of battalions knifing forward with 2/25 in the lead. The drive netted some 1,500 yards, as the Marines secured the area due north of the airfield and occupied the ridge beyond. Although Marine patrols discovered that Aslito field had been abandoned, Colonel Kelley was unwilling to occupy it with elements of his 165th Infantry. He believed that any further advance would have involved exchanging a good defensive position for a poor one, and in the process assuming a frontage too wide for his pair of battalions. Thus, the successful 2/25 found itself about 600 yards forward of the unit on its right. Colonel Batchelder now ordered his 3d Battalion to form a line facing southward toward the vacant runways and battered buildings. A narrow gap, however, still existed between the Marine and Army regiments.

The 24th Marines, in the left-center of the 4th Marine Division zone of action, had been plagued throughout the early morning by incoming fire from mortars, artillery, and machine guns, as well as by air bursts from

¹⁵ 27th InfDiv G-1 PeriodicRpt. 17Jun44.

40mm antiaircraft guns. A 15-minute artillery preparation did not silence all these Japanese weapons, many of which continued to inflict casualties during the day. Because the division front was growing wider as the Marines moved inland, the 24th Marines had to shift its axis of advance slightly to the north, with 1/24 making a wide turning movement to come abreast of the 2d Battalion. A deluge of shells from antiaircraft guns, probably located near Nafutan Point, delayed completion of the planned maneuver by 1/24. By 1000, the long-range fire had subsided, so that Major Fricke's men, supported by mortars and by LVT(A)s, could overwhelm light opposition to capture their objective.

The attack of 2/24 also was slow in gaining momentum. On the battalion left, the 23d Marines found itself confronted by a defiant and well-entrenched group of Japanese from the *47th Independent Mixed Brigade*. These resolute defenders not only prevented the Marine units from maintaining contact along the regimental boundary but also turned a 3-inch dual-purpose gun against 2/24. The weapon was soon silenced, but almost an hour passed before Rothwell's battalion could extend to its left, make contact, and begin moving forward in the face of mortar concentrations and intermittent 40mm fire, probably from the same antiaircraft guns that were harassing the 1st Battalion.

At 1500, a barrage of 4.5-inch rockets, fired in support of the adjacent 23d Marines, struck the battalion, caus-

ing 20 casualties.¹⁶ In spite of this accident, Rothwell's Marines continued their attack in the face of increasing resistance. The battalion was poised to make a final lunge toward its objective, when a savage concentration of enemy fire erupted from the face of a cliff only 300 yards to the front. Caught in the open and unable to gouge foxholes in the hard coral, the Marines twice fell back, yielding some 600 yards in order to obtain a suitable defensive position. The 2d Battalion had suffered 53 casualties in advancing slightly more than 2,000 yards.

The 23d Marines was in the meantime being fought to a standstill southeast of Lake Susupe, in front of a hill that jutted from the objective ridge. All went well until the 1st Battalion attempted to cross the valley beyond Mount Fina Susu. Lieutenant Colonel Haas' Marines were stopped in their tracks, even though the 2d Battalion, attacking on the right, was able to push steadily forward. The two units soon lost contact, so Colonel Jones was forced to use 3/23, his regimental reserve, to restore the line. Since the 2d Marine Division had been stymied in the southern part of its zone, the two divisions were unable to form a continuous line. (See Map 17.)

General Schmidt's Marines and soldiers had gained the central portion of their objective, but on either flank the line receded somewhat. Although Aslito airfield had not been occupied, Colonel Kelley's soldiers seemed capable

¹⁶ A provisional rocket detachment had been attached to the headquarters battalions of both Marine divisions. The missiles were fired from multiple launchers mounted on trucks.

of overrunning that installation come morning. Also, the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Marvin H. Floom's 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion, detached from the 10th Marines, indicated that the 4th Marine Division would receive additional fire support when the attack was renewed.

THE AMERICAN BUILD-UP CONTINUES

While the fighting raged a few thousand yards inland, command posts were being occupied along the western coast. Marine observation planes were preparing to operate from the Charan Kanoa flight strip, and additional troops were pouring ashore. At 1530 on 17 June, General Holland Smith entered the ruins of Charan Kanoa to direct the efforts of Northern Troops and Landing Force. Meanwhile, General Harper had chosen a site from which to direct his corps artillery, but his 155mm battalions would not land until the next day. General Ralph Smith also arrived on the island to assume command of his 27th Infantry Division. The 165th Infantry, however, was to remain attached to General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division for the time being.

Colonel Leonard A. Bishop's 105th Infantry landed during the day. Although all three rifle battalions came ashore ready to enter the fight, most of the regimental communications gear and transport as well as some elements of its headquarters troops were left behind on their transport.¹⁷ Since that

¹⁷ When it became evident that he would not be able to land much of his regimental headquarters and unit supplies, Colonel Bishop

vessel promptly set sail as Admiral Spruance had directed, a week passed before the missing men and equipment landed at Saipan. Acting upon orders from Holland Smith, Bishop posted 2/105 to the rear of the 4th Marine Division to guard against an enemy breakthrough.

Another Army unit which had difficulty in landing was the 864th Antiaircraft Artillery Group. The reef blocked the progress of its landing craft, so the group was unable to move into position until the next day. The 106th Infantry remained afloat as Expeditionary Troops reserve.

Although the transports began weighing anchor as darkness approached, the impending departure of these ships and the redeployment of Turner's combat vessels caused no great concern among the troops ashore, except for the equipment-short 105th Infantry.¹⁸ Over 33,000 tons of cargo had been unloaded to sustain Northern Troops and Landing Force until the convoy returned. The situation was far different from that faced less than two years before by General Vandegrift's 1st Marine Division, when its amphibious shipping suddenly vanished from the dangerous waters off Guadalcanal.

Although the combat efficiency of Northern Troops and Landing Force was regarded as "very satisfactory, impaired to a certain degree by a considerable number of casualties," Colonel

moved ashore ahead of schedule with some key personnel and communications gear. Until its ship returned, the 105th used some repaired Japanese trucks to meet its need for motor transport. Col Leonard A. Bishop, USA, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 28Feb63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Robert E. Hogaboom, corps G-3, detected in the events of 17 June "the first signs of weakening enemy resistance."¹⁹ The 2d Marine Division estimated 2,650 enemy dead in its zone, while the 25th Marines claimed that it alone had killed 1,550 Japanese.²⁰ The defenders of southern Saipan had suffered numerous casualties, though probably fewer than the Americans believed. Whatever the actual total of enemy dead, the coastal perimeter defenses had been shattered.

During the night of 17-18 June, a few weak counterattacks were crushed by Northern Troops and Landing Force. Weariness, casualties, and severed communications prevented the *136th Infantry Regiment* and *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* from making another serious effort to break through to the western beaches. Instead of a frontal attack, the Saipan garrison attempted a counterlanding behind the Marines—a move which had been anticipated.²¹ Of about 35 landing craft that took part in the ill-fated venture, 13 were sunk by fire from patrolling warships or from the 105mm howitzers of 4/10. The Japanese who survived the shelling turned back to scurry ashore near Tanapag.

Enemy aircraft reappeared during the evening to flail away at American shipping. Truk-based planes launched torpedoes at units of the Southern Attack Force, nervously awaiting W-Day at Guam, and damaged one LCT so badly that it had to be scuttled.

¹⁹ NTLF G-3 PeriodicRpt, 16-17Jun44.

²⁰ NTLF G-2 PeriodicRpt, 16-17Jun44.

²¹ RAdm Herbert B. Knowles ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 30Jan63.

Fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo craft from Yap damaged an LST that was retiring with the transports. Later the same airmen struck an escort carrier group, inflicting grave damage on the *Fanshaw Bay*.

18 JUNE—"THE BEGINNING OF OUR SHOWDOWN FIGHT."

As the third day of the battle for Saipan drew to a close, the Japanese premier, Hideki Tojo, radioed those in command of the beleaguered garrison that: "Because the fate of the Japanese empire depends on the result of your operation, inspire the spirit of officers and men and to the very end continue to destroy the enemy gallantly and persistently; thus alleviate the anxiety of our Emperor."²² Although this broadcast was intended to be inspirational, it all but conceded the eventual loss of Saipan. The *Thirty-first Army* headquarters, however, framed a reply that indicated "Have received your honorable Imperial words," read the message, "by becoming bulwark of the Pacific with 10,000 deaths, we hope to requite Imperial favor."²³

The *Thirty-first Army* acting chief of staff,²⁴ at a command post in the mountains east of Garapan, knew few details concerning the actual progress

²² NTLF G-2, Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg File, no. 115, pt. 1, hereafter *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg*.

²³ NTLF G-2, Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg File, no. 1046, hereafter *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg*.

²⁴ Major General Tamura, the army chief of staff, was trapped with General Obata on Guam.

of the battle. After piecing together the few reports that reached him, he concluded that the situation facing the defenders on the morning of 18 June was bleak indeed. He had no information on troop dispositions in the south except the assurance that three reserve companies were in the immediate vicinity of *43d Division* headquarters. Rumor had it that General Saito was dead. Nothing, it seemed, could stop the American advance across Aslito airfield, and a powerful attack toward Garapan appeared in the making.²⁵ If the Japanese high command had on the morning of the 18th any flickering hopes of a victory ashore, such sentiments would not last the day.

Two American attacks were planned for 18 June. At 1000, both Marine divisions would strike, to be followed two hours later by the 27th Infantry Division. General Ralph Smith was granted the additional time to move his 105th Infantry into position along the coast on the right of the 4th Marine Division.

The close of the previous day's fighting had found the 8th Marines in possession of a hill that overlooked a staunchly defended coconut grove. Now, while the rest of General Watson's division dispatched patrols and improved positions, the 8th Marines renewed its effort to seize this objective. Supported by a 15-minute preparation by 2/10, a barrage that had to be carefully adjusted to avoid hitting nearby elements of the 4th Marine Division, 2/8 stormed through the stand of splintered trees. At the same time,

1/29 pushed forward, keeping abreast of Chamberlin's battalion. Because of these gains, contact was temporarily restored between divisions, but by dusk a gap had been reopened.

At 1000, the 4th Marine Division also attacked, plunging forward with three regiments abreast. On the left, the 23d Marines underwent a hasty reorganization prior to crossing the line of departure. The attached 3/24 passed through 1/23, while Colonel Jones attached the rifle companies and mortar platoon of 3/23 to the 2d Battalion. Finally, the 1st Battalion and the headquarters elements of the 3d were merged, charged with supporting the advance from the slopes of Fina Susu, and entrusted to Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove. The assault battalions soon were stalled by machine gun and mortar fire, but the prompt commitment of Cosgrove's composite unit sent the attack rolling forward once again. Although patrols reached the regimental objective, Japanese machine gunners prevented the Marines from occupying the ridge. In order to obtain ground suited to the defense, Jones had to withdraw his regiment to positions 400 yards east of Lake Susupe. This withdrawal severed the link so recently re-established with the adjacent 8th Marines.

During the afternoon, as the 23d Marines were advancing steadily, a 75mm half-track, supporting the 2d Battalion, fired into a cave in which the Japanese were manufacturing picric acid. A cloud of sickening fumes enveloped the infantrymen crouching near the opening; two men were overcome with attacks of violent nausea, and the gas alarm was sounded. Since

²⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1047.

the Marines made a habit of discarding gas masks as soon as they landed, many an uneasy moment passed before the cloud evaporated. Riflemen resolved never again to part with their gas masks, and an anonymous lieutenant dashed into the division command post to ask a startled General Schmidt if he had a mask to spare.²⁶

While the men of the 23d Marines were recovering from the confusion caused by the providentially false gas alarm, the 24th and 25th Marines were fast closing on the eastern shore of Saipan. Both regiments advanced swiftly, even though the 24th Marines had to deal with a desperate counterattack. At 1615, after the regimental supporting armor had retired to take on ammunition and gasoline, two Japanese tanks rumbled close to American lines and raked the Marines with fire from cannon and machine guns. Although the vehicles were driven off by artillery and bazookas, the sudden foray resulted in 15 American casualties. In spite of the hectic exchange, both regiments reached Magicienne Bay, thus isolating Nafutan Point from the rest of the island.

In order to reach the coast, the 24th Marines bypassed a fortified cliff that extended southward into its zone of action. The mission of securing this stronghold was assigned to 1/25, the division reserve. Because of the steep slope and the numerous caves, a coordinated sweep was impossible. The fight for the cliff was a series of separate actions in which four or five Marines,

hugging the jagged rocks to avoid enemy fire, climbed close to the mouth of a cave and attempted to kill the defenders with a burst from a flame-thrower or with demolitions charges. If the cave proved so deep or tortuous that the enemy troops could escape the effects of fire or of concussion, the attackers blasted shut the entrance and left the entombed Japanese to suffocate.

The 165th Infantry began the day amid some confusion, for Colonel Kelley was not certain whether his command was to operate as a part of the 4th Marine Division or of the 27th Infantry Division. He directed his S-3 to call General Schmidt's D-3 section, but the ensuing conversation did not clarify the status of the Army regiment. After discussing the matter with General Ralph Smith, Kelley concluded that he was again part of the Army division and would receive a formal order to that effect from General Schmidt. Although no such order arrived, the 165th Infantry attacked at 0730 to secure the ridge in the right-hand portion of its zone and 30 minutes later began advancing on the airfield. By 1000, both objectives were firmly in American hands. The regiment then paused to regroup and in doing so came under fire from dual-purpose guns located on Nafutan Point. These weapons soon were silenced by American artillery, so that the soldiers could advance to the ridge that overlooked Magicienne Bay.

The 105th Infantry, attacking along the southern coast, encountered difficulty from the outset. Both 3/105 and 1/105, which were to have relieved Kelley's 1st and 3d Battalions by noon, were about 45 minutes late in carrying

²⁶ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to CMC, dtd 8Jan 50, quoted in Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 104. No copy of this letter has been found.

out their assignments. When the advance finally got underway, the troops entered a maze of dense undergrowth broken by coral peaks, some of them 90 feet high. Even though the Japanese chose not to oppose the passage, Colonel Bishop's men gained no more than 200 yards.

As darkness came on 18 June, Northern Troops and Landing Force held approximately three-fourths of southern Saipan. The enemy still clung to the approaches to Garapan, the foothills of Mount Tipo Pale, and a salient extending from Hill 500 toward Lake Susupe, as well as the jungle-clad hills southeast of Aslito field. Since the 4th Marine Division had captured a small segment of the eastern coast, the Japanese troops who had retreated toward Nafutan Point were isolated from their companions in the north. Elements of XXIV Corps Artillery, assisted by observation planes from the Charan Kanoa strip, had begun firing. General Holland Smith, concerned that his stockpile of supplies might become dangerously low, requested that the transports return on the following day, but Admiral Turner would release only those vessels carrying critical items. Two hospital ships made rendezvous on the 18th with the transports in order to pick up the seriously wounded. All in all, the situation looked as promising to American eyes as it seemed grave to the Japanese. (See Map 17.)

The *Thirty-first Army* now informed Tokyo that:

The Army is consolidating its battle lines and has decided to prepare for a showdown fight. It is concentrating the 43d Division in the area east of Tapotchau. The remaining units (two battalions of the 135th Infantry, one composite bat-

talion, and one naval unit) are concentrating in the area east of Garapan.²⁷

The new defensive line would extend inland from a point just south of Garapan, past the cliffs guarding the approaches to Mount Tapotchau, to the shores of Magicienne Bay. Perhaps the only consolation to the enemy was the knowledge that Saito was alive to direct the impending battle.

Among the missions assigned the troops manning the new line was that of preventing the Americans from using Aslito field, a task that would have to be accomplished by infiltration since most of the Japanese artillery had been destroyed. In addition, the defenders were to hold the Marpi Point airstrip and portions of the northern beaches so that supplies and reinforcements could be landed.²⁸ Along with these instructions, Tokyo broadcast further words of inspiration. "Although the front-line officers and troops are fighting splendidly," read a message from the Emperor, "if Saipan is lost, air raids on Tokyo will take place often; therefore you will hold Saipan."²⁹ On the same evening that this exhortation arrived, the *Thirty-first Army* intelligence section began burning all but a few of its code books to prevent their capture.³⁰

19 JUNE: THE FIGHTING ASHORE

On the morning of 19 June, after passing the quietest night since D-Day, the Marine and Army divisions continued their attack. In the north, the 2d

²⁷ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1050.

²⁸ *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg* No. 150; *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1054.

²⁹ *Thirty-first Ar Incoming Msg* No. 152.

³⁰ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1057.



HAND GRENADES are tossed by riflemen at Japanese positions as the battle lines move across Saipan from the invasion beaches. (USMC 83366)



SKIRMISH LINE of 27th Division infantrymen moves out to mop up the enemy on Nafutan Point. (USA SC210608)

Marine Division reorganized and sent patrols ahead of the battle position. The division reserve, 1/2, passed to regimental control. One company from 2/6, attached to the 2d Marines, was returned to its parent regiment. The patrols dispatched that day resulted in the destruction of three enemy tanks and the occupation of Hill 790, in the 6th Marines zone, a formidable height which the Japanese obligingly yielded. The 8th Marines probed the defenses to their front while simultaneously looking for routes over which to supply future operations. (See Map 17.)

As the 4th Marine Division was preparing to launch its attack, Japanese infantrymen and their armored support were seen massing in the vicinity of Tsutsuuran. Artillery fire promptly dispersed the enemy force, and the Marines lunged forward. While the 24th and 25th Marines consolidated their positions, the 23d Marines, with 3/24 attached, advanced almost to Hill 500. During the attack, Vandegrift's 3/24 was pinched out of the line, and Dillon's 2/23 along with Cosgrove's composite unit assumed responsibility for the entire regimental zone. The day's gains, however, could not be held because of the danger that the enemy might infiltrate along the division boundary, so the 23d Marines withdrew about 400 yards. Among the casualties was Lieutenant Colonel Cosgrove, wounded by a sniper's bullet; he was replaced by Major Paul S. Treitel.

Along the southern coast, the 27th Infantry Division was having difficulty in keeping its lines intact. The 165th Infantry pushed the remaining distance to Magicienne Bay, thus keeping

contact with the 4th Marine Division on the left. The attack of the 105th Infantry, however, bogged down in front of a sheer cliff. A gap opened between the two regiments, but the 165th Infantry patrolled the area. In addition, 1/105 and 3/105 could not keep abreast, and 1/165 had to be employed to restore the line.

During the early morning of 20 June, the Japanese struck back with local counterattacks. A force of 75 stormed the positions of 2/24 and was repulsed, but not before 11 Marines had been wounded. In the 6th Marines sector, some 15 Japanese infiltrators did little damage.

While jabbing at American lines, the defenders were falling back to the line selected on the previous day. General Saito, however, had suddenly become concerned lest the flank of this new position be turned. He directed the *118th Infantry Regiment*, reinforced by tanks, to guard against a landing in the vicinity of Laulau on Magicienne Bay.³¹ (See Map 18.)

During the course of the day, *Thirty-first Army* headquarters received additional reports from the units fighting in southern Saipan. According to the army chief of staff's tally, 3½ of *43d Division's* 7 infantry battalions and two-thirds of its artillery had been destroyed. The *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* no longer had any artillery and was unable to estimate the number of infantry units still capable of offering organized resistance. Of three or more rifle battalions that had been organized from the miscellaneous units stranded

³¹ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10531, excerpts from a Notebook of FOs.

at Saipan when the invasion took place, approximately one battalion remained intact. Three engineer companies had been shattered completely, and only one antiaircraft battery remained in action. Although a few artillery pieces survived, all the Army artillery battalions were disorganized. Between 15 and 20 percent of the total Army strength was dead, wounded, or prisoners of war.³²

The land operations that took place on 19 June were important. Steady pressure had been maintained on the Japanese by Marine infantry units. Corps and division artillery blanketed with fire enemy troop concentrations and weapons positions, while Army antiaircraft guns went into position to protect Aslito field. The retreating Japanese, it seemed, were showing the effects of the constant hammering. Northern Troops and Landing Force intelligence officers could take heart from the surrender of five thirsty Japanese, who claimed that the garrison was dependent on rainfall for its water supply.³³ Yet, the most significant events of 19 June took place at sea.

*THE BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINE SEA*³⁴

As his warships neared the Marianas, Admiral Ozawa realized that his attempt to cripple Spruance's fleet depended upon the cooperation of land-

based Japanese aircraft and the determination of Saipan's garrison. General Saito's men, though they were fighting desperately, had been driven from the ridges that dominated the western beaches. The invaders had landed enough men and supplies to enable them to dispense temporarily with their transports. Yet, the Japanese soldiers had been partially successful. While the vulnerable transports had withdrawn to the east, Saipan was far from secured, so Spruance's ships remained, in a very real sense, tied to the beachhead.

The promised attempt by the Japanese to fly land-based bombers into the Marianas was less than a partial success. American raids on the Volcano-Bonin Islands destroyed some of the enemy planes, and others were stopped by adverse weather. A few aircraft succeeded in getting through, and these took part in a series of raids launched on 18 June.

At 0540 on that day, the Japanese attacked the old battleships, inflicting no damage, but later in the day three American oilers were damaged, one seriously. The last effort of the day, directed against the escort carriers, cost the Japanese five fighters. Unfortunately, 19 of the intercepting American planes crashed while attempting to land on the carriers after dark.³⁵ A Japanese naval aviator, who had helped dispatch 120-130 aircraft, most of them manned by student pilots, from Japan to the Marianas, later estimated that only 40 percent of the pilots

³² *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1060.

³³ TF 56 G-3 Periodic Rpt, 19-20Jun44.

³⁴ An additional source for this section is: CinCPac-CinCPOA Ops in POA, Jun44, Anx A, pt. VII.

³⁵ *TF 52.2 OpRpt*, p. 124.

and virtually none of the planes survived the aerial battles of 18 June.³⁶

As the Japanese planes were limping back to their bases, Admiral Spruance maneuvered to prevent the enemy from getting past his ships to attack Saipan. Recent submarine sightings and interceptions of enemy radio messages by high frequency direction finders seemed to indicate that Ozawa would divide his forces, but this was not the case. The Japanese admiral was intent on destroying the American carriers.

On the morning of 19 June, the enemy launched the first of four powerful raids. When the gigantic air battle ended, 330 of the 430 planes launched by the enemy carriers had been destroyed. American attacks against airfields on Guam accounted for another 50 Japanese planes. In contrast, Mitscher's carriers lost 30 planes, 13 of them as a result of the sweeps over Guam.

Ship losses on 19 June also indicated that an American victory was in the making. Japanese bombers had slightly damaged the battleship *South Dakota* and scored near misses on two carriers and a cruiser, while an enemy plane had crashed the *Indiana*, but two of Ozawa's nine carriers were sunk by submarines. The Japanese ships now altered course to avoid the lash of Mitscher's planes long enough to refuel.

As a result of the enemy's change of course, American airmen were unable to deliver an attack of their own until late in the afternoon of 20 June. Ad-

miral Spruance then took a calculated risk in ordering the strike, for it was certain the planes could not get back to the carriers until after dark. The flyers sunk one carrier, slightly damaged two others, and downed 65 Japanese planes. American losses numbered 100 planes, but only about 20 of these were destroyed by the enemy. The rest crashed on or near the carriers, while attempting night landings. Although the waiting ships turned on their lights to aid the pilots, many planes were so low on gasoline that the first approach, good or bad, had to be the last one. Many of the pilots and crewmen who crashed were rescued from the sea that night and on the next day.

Ozawa had been crushed. Admiral Turner now was free to concentrate on supporting the troops ashore. On 20 June, as the Japanese were reeling under the blows of Mitscher's airmen, the transports unloaded 11,536 tons of supplies. In the following several days, increasing numbers of ships returned from the deployment area and the volume of supplies unloaded rose swiftly. With the defeat of the Japanese fleet, the eventual doom of the enemy garrison was assured. The defenders could no longer win the battle for Saipan, but they would fight as valiantly as though their triumph was certain.

THE CAPTURE OF HILL 500

On 20 June, while Navy planes were seeking out Ozawa's fleet, Marine and Army troops continued their pressure on the retreating enemy at Saipan.

³⁶ USSBS *Interrogation* Nav No. 91, Captain Akira Sasaki, IJN, dtd 23Nov45, II, p. 396.

In the northern part of the American beachhead, the 2d and 6th Marines continued patrolling, while the 8th Marines and the 4th Marine Division attempted to complete the turning movement that would enable the invaders to begin advancing north along the island spine. Meanwhile, in the south, the 27th Infantry Division persisted in its efforts to destroy the Japanese troops entrenched at Nafutan Point.

Patrols from the 2d Marines penetrated almost to the southern outskirts of Garapan, while those sent out by the 6th Marines discovered that the enemy had withdrawn at least 500 yards. Neither regiment, however, could advance until the 8th Marines had pushed forward. On 20 June, Colonel Wallace's unit completed its portion of the turning movement, with 2/8 advancing to the left of Hill 500 and gaining its part of the objective line against light opposition. The change in direction shortened the regimental front so that Colonel Wallace could move 3/8 and 1/29 into reserve, leaving 1/8 and 2/8 to man the line.

General Ralph Smith's troops had taken over responsibility for mopping up the shores of Magicienne Bay. Able to concentrate on its drive north, the 4th Marine Division made impressive gains during the day. The attack, originally scheduled for 0900, was delayed for 90 minutes to allow the 25th Marines, less its 1st Battalion, to replace the weary 23d. Critical terrain in the division zone was Hill 500, which was to be taken by Colonel Batchelder's regiment.

Because of the narrow frontage as-

signed him, Colonel Batchelder decided to attack in a column of battalions, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3d Battalion leading the way. While the 1st Provisional Rocket Detachment, the regimental 37mm guns, and the battalion 81mm mortars joined the 1st and 3d Battalions, 14th Marines, in blasting the hill, Chambers' men, concealed by a smoke screen, advanced across the level ground to Laulau road, some 500 yards from the objective. Here the battalion reorganized, and, as the preparatory barrage increased in severity, the Marines began moving through wisps of smoke toward the crest. Although the summit was gained about noon, the sealing or burning out of bypassed caves took up most of the afternoon. When the action ended, 44 Japanese bodies littered the hill, while an unknown number lay entombed beneath its surface. The Marines lost 9 killed and 40 wounded, comparatively few casualties in contrast to the number the enemy might have exacted had he chosen to defend the hill more vigorously.

While Chambers' men were seizing Hill 500, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 24th Marines were racing forward a distance of 2,700 yards. Although these units encountered fire from rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, and occasionally from mortars, the Japanese had withdrawn the bulk of their forces to man the new defensive line. Assisted by medium tanks, armored LVTs, and light tanks mounting flamethrowers, Lieutenant Colonel Rothwell's 2/24 executed what the battalion commander termed "the best coordi-

nated tank and infantry attack of the operation.”³⁷ In doing so, the battalion suffered 32 casualties.

During the 4th Marine Division swing toward the north, Lieutenant Colonel Mustain’s 1/25 was battling to drive the enemy from the cliff bypassed on 18 June by the 24th Marines. On the 19th, Mustain’s battalion attacked directly toward the sheer western face of the objective, gaining little ground and suffering 26 casualties. Now, on the 20th, he struck from the south. Twice American tanks thundered forward in an unsuccessful effort to draw enemy fire. The third time the armor advanced, Marine infantrymen also moved forward, and the Japanese greeted Mustain’s troops with a deluge of fire. In spite of this violent opposition, the attackers moved steadily northward. Flamethrower operators and demolitions teams cleaned out those caves that could be approached on foot, while tanks fired into the openings cut into the face of the cliff.

In an accident reminiscent of the blockhouse explosion on Namur, a Japanese ammunition dump hidden in a cane field at the base of the cliff exploded, temporarily disorganizing Company A. The blast may have been caused by a Japanese shell, but it could have occurred when the flames set by American tracers reached the stockpile of explosives. Mustain’s losses for the entire day totaled 31 killed or wounded.

South of the cliff, General Ralph Smith’s soldiers continued their attack

toward Nafutan Point. Two battalions of the 165th Infantry, attacking from the north and northwest, gained about 1,000 yards, but 3/105 had a difficult time in overcoming the cave defenses dug into the cliffs and ridges within its zone. On 20 June, the last of General Ralph Smith’s regiments, Colonel Russell G. Ayres’ 106th Infantry, came ashore. General Holland Smith felt that he might need the regiment at Saipan, even though it had been earmarked as reserve for the Guam landings. Admiral Turner agreed with the Marine general, but he specified that as much as possible of the unit equipment be left on board ship to speed the eventual movement to Guam. Once ashore, the 106th Infantry became Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve, thus releasing 2/105 to division control.

Other heartening changes in the tactical situation took place on 20 June. The first American plane to use Aslito field³⁸ touched down that evening. Also, the 155mm guns of XXIV Corps Artillery began firing at targets on Tinian. With all of southern Saipan except Nafutan Point under American control, General Holland Smith could devote his full attention to shattering General Saito’s mid-island defense line.

³⁸ Upon its capture by the 165th Infantry, Aslito field had been renamed in honor of Colonel Gardiner J. Conroy, regimental commander killed at Makin. Later the installation was officially christened Iseley Field in memory of Commander Robert H. Isely, a naval aviator killed during a preinvasion strike. For unexplained reasons, the original spelling of Isely was not retained by the XXI Bomber Command. See Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 515n.

³⁷ 2/24 Narrative, p. 5.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE DRIVE TO THE NORTH

Prior to launching their blows against the newly formed Japanese line, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions spent 21 June, D plus 6, in reorganizing, moving up supplies, and probing for enemy strongpoints which would have to be reduced when the attack began. Japanese troops who had taken refuge in the swamps surrounding Lake Susupe had been a source of trouble throughout the operation. A patrol attempted on 19 June to flush out these stragglers, killing seven of them and capturing a pair of machine guns before being forced to withdraw. A larger patrol returned the following day, but it too was not powerful enough to complete the task. On 21 June, 1/106 received orders to secure the area, and the Army unit went into action the following day. Although the soldiers conscientiously searched the marsh, they were unable to kill all the Japanese hiding there. The area remained a haven for enemy infiltrators for some time to come.

Elsewhere in the 2d Marine Division zone, patrols sought information on enemy defenses. A strong position was located south of Garapan, but neither the 6th nor 8th Marines was able to learn anything concerning General Saito's recent preparations. The 8th Marines took advantage of the lull to relieve 2/8 with 1/29, and the 2d 155mm Howitzer Battalion reverted to control of the 10th Marines.

On the right, the 4th Marine Division also paused before attacking along the east coast. Since 31 Japanese had been slain on Hill 500 during the pre-

vious night, 3/25 once again probed the caves that scarred its slopes. Lieutenant Colonel Chambers talked two enemy soldiers captured on the hill into trying to convince their comrades to surrender. Two wounded men yielded to their arguments, but four others emerged from their caves rifles ready and had to be killed.

At Nafutan Point, the 27th Infantry Division on 21 June continued its slow, cave-by-cave advance. In the midst of the day's action, an order arrived at Ralph Smith's headquarters directing the division, less one battalion and a light tank platoon, to pass into Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve and assemble northwest of Aslito field. A separate sub-paragraph assigned the reinforced battalion the mission of mopping up Nafutan Point and protecting the airstrip.³⁹ This assignment was made in the third paragraph of the order, the place, according to both Army and Marine Corps usage, where the commander stated the mission of his subordinate units.

Almost five hours after receiving the order, Ralph Smith telephoned Holland Smith to urge that a regiment rather than a battalion be assigned the job of reducing Nafutan Point. The Marine general approved the employment of the more powerful force, provided that one battalion was available for operations elsewhere on the island. At 2000, the Commanding General, 27th Infantry Division, ordered the 105th Infantry to "hold present front line facing Nafutan Point, with two battalions on line and one battalion in regi-

³⁹ NTLF OpO 9-44, dtd 21Jun44.

mental reserve.”⁴⁰ The regiment was to relieve by 0630 on 22 June those elements of the 165th Infantry manning the front lines, reorganize, and resume the attack by 1100 on the same day. The reserve battalion of the 105th Infantry could not be employed without General Ralph Smith’s approval.

At 0830 on 22 June, a modification of the previous NTLF order reached 27th Infantry Division Headquarters. The major change was the selection of a regiment, obviously the 105th Infantry, instead of a battalion to “continue the mission . . . of clearing up remaining resistance and patrolling [the] area.”⁴¹ Although the revised order from Northern Troops and Landing Force varied only slightly from the instructions issued by Ralph Smith, the fact that two commanders issued different orders to the same unit later served as partial justification for the relief of the Army general.

Holland Smith’s original order had in its third paragraph detailed a reinforced battalion to eliminate the Japanese resistance on Nafutan Point. The Marine general considered this proof enough that the unit involved was under Northern Troops and Landing Force control. The substitution of a regiment for a battalion did not alter the command situation. Apparently his Army subordinate assumed otherwise, for Ralph Smith issued his field order for 22 June as though the Nafutan force were responsible directly to the 27th Infantry Division. Technically at least, he had contravened an

order of his Marine superior. Also, Ralph Smith had specified that the 105th Infantry hold its present positions until late the following morning, even though the change to the NTLF order, which arrived after the division had assigned the regiment its mission, directed that the attack be continued. Both generals looked forward to taking the offensive, but by going on the defensive for even a few hours, Ralph Smith, his Marine corps commander later maintained, had countermanded a lawful order.⁴²

At dusk of 21 June, while the two generals were in the midst of issuing the series of orders which would become so controversial, the frontline troops steeled themselves for the usual night infiltration. Scarcely had the sun gone down, when infiltrators managed to touch off a 2d Marine Division ammunition dump on Green 1. Explosions continued to spew shell fragments over the beach throughout the night, but the Marines along the front lines passed a quiet night. Clashes between patrols and minor attempts at infiltration occurred, but there was no major counterattack.

In the 4th Marine Division sector, four more Japanese were killed at Hill

⁴⁰ 27th InfDiv FO No. 45A, dtd 21Jun44.

⁴¹ 27th InfDiv G-3 Jnl, 22Jun44, msg no. 14.

⁴² Cf. Testimony of MajGen Ralph C. Smith, dtd 31Jul44, p. 6, Exhibit AAA to Proceedings of a Board of Officers Appointed by Letter Orders Serial AG 333/3, 4Jul44, HQ, USAF CPA, hereafter *Army Inquiry*; CG, Expeditionary Trps memo to CTF 51, dtd 24Jun44, Subj: Authority to Relieve Army Officers from Command, Exhibit D to *Army Inquiry*; CG, NTLF memo to CTF 51, dtd 27Jun44, Subj: Summary of Events Leading to Relief from Command of MajGen Ralph C. Smith, USA, Exhibit E to *Army Inquiry*.

500, and enemy bombs crashed harmlessly to earth in the vicinity of General Schmidt's command post. The same 12-plane flight that attacked the beach-head also tried to destroy the transports but was thwarted by a smoke screen. On the following morning, the

fight for central Saipan would begin, as the Marines advanced toward some of the most formidable terrain on the entire island—the jumble of peaks that extended from the vicinity of Mount Tapotchau onto Kagman Peninsula. (See Maps 17 and 18.)

The Fight for Central Saipan¹

On the evening of 21 June, the day before the attack northward was scheduled to begin, Northern Troops and Landing Force reported its combat efficiency as "very satisfactory,"² in spite of the 6,165 casualties incurred since 15 June. During the fight for southern Saipan, the 2d Marine Division had suffered 2,514 killed, wounded, and missing, while the losses of the 4th Marine Division totaled 3,628. The 27th Infantry Division, which had not taken part in the costly assault landings, lost 320 officers and men in overrunning Aslito field and seizing the approaches to Nafutan Point. General Harper's XXIV Corps Artillery and the provisional antiaircraft group had yet to lose a man. Force troops had suffered two casualties, both men wounded in action.

THE ATTACK OF 22 JUNE

Numerous as these casualties had been, General Holland Smith believed

¹ Unless other noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *2d Mar SAR*; *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *10th Mar SAR*; *14th Mar Rpt*; *23d Mar Rpt*; *24th Mar Rpt*; *25th Mar Rpt*; *105th Inf OpRpt*; *106th Inf OpRpt*; *165th Inf OpRpt*; *1/8 OpRpt*; *2/23 Rpt*; *3/23 OpRpt*; *2/24 Narrative*; *1/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Rpt*; *3/25 Narrative*; *3/25 Saga*; *1/29 SAR*; Love, *27th InfDiv History*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*.

² NTLF G-3 Periodic Rpt, 20-21Jun44.

his two Marine divisions were capable of advancing a maximum distance of 4,000 yards by dusk on 22 June. The 2d Marine Division was to move forward a few hundred yards along the western coast, to seize Mount Tipo Pale in the center of its zone, and on the right to capture Mount Tapotchau, some 3,000 yards forward of the line of departure. While General Watson's troops wheeled past Mount Tapotchau, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division would keep pace by securing the series of ridges along the division boundary, driving the enemy from Hill 600, and capturing the two terrain features which lay southeast of Mt. Tapotchau that later bore the ominous names of Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge. If the divisions became extended over too wide an area, Holland Smith planned to commit the 27th Infantry Division, less the regiment which was in action at Nafutan Point. Uncertain where the Army troops might be needed, the corps commander directed Ralph Smith to select routes over which his men might march to the assistance of either frontline division. A total of 18 artillery battalions was to support the main attack.

At 0600 on 22 June, after a 10-minute artillery preparation, the Northern Troops and Landing Force offensive got underway. In the 2d Marine Division zone, the 2d Marines stood fast along the coast, while the 6th and 8th

Marines plunged into a tangle of brush-covered ridges and deep gullies. Attacking in the center of the division zone, the 6th Marines had to maintain contact with the stationary 2d Marines on the left as well as with the advancing 8th Marines. To solve this problem, Colonel Riseley let the progress of the 8th Marines, which had a greater distance to travel, determine his pace. No resistance was encountered until early afternoon, when the 6th Marines began advancing up the slopes of Mount Tipo Pale.

One rifle company sidestepped a ravine strongpoint near the base of the hill and moved unopposed to the summit. The remainder of 3/6 followed the same route to the top of the 1,100-foot peak, but a sheer drop, not shown on the maps, and accurate enemy fire prevented the battalion from moving down the northern slope. While 3/6 made its ascent, the strongpoint below was proving more powerful than anticipated.

The 6th Marines' scout-sniper platoon was the first unit to attack the ravine which 3/6 had bypassed. These few Marines soon discovered that the Japanese had tunneled into several steep bluffs separated by ravines which extended like fingers from the massive hill. The earlier action had disclosed only one of several mutually supporting positions. A rifle company from 2/2, still attached to Riseley's command, took over from the scouts the task of reducing the strongpoint. After destroying a few Japanese emplacements, the unit found itself caught in a deadly crossfire and had to withdraw. The enemy would cling to these formidable positions for two additional days before

retreating to the north. The presence of this band of determined Japanese caused Riseley to bend his lines back along the fringe of the strongpoint, so that 2/2 faced more to the east than to the north.

In the 4th Division zone meanwhile, General Schmidt, prior to launching his attack, selected an intermediate objective line drawn near the base of Hill 600. Here the regiments could pause to reorganize before advancing the final 2,000 yards that separated them from the day's objective chosen by General Holland Smith. The rugged terrain as well as the distance to be covered compelled General Schmidt to employ this additional means of controlling the advance.

The 4th Marine Division moved forward with Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines on the left, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines along the east coast, and Colonel Jones' 23d Marines in reserve. In front of Batchelder's troops lay the most jumbled terrain in the division zone, a series of four ridges that had for control purposes been labeled as 0-A, 0-B, 0-C, and 0-D. The last of these coincided with the intermediate objective. Fortunately, the regimental frontage was narrow enough to permit Batchelder to attack in a column of battalions, a formation that gave him a great degree of flexibility. Should he have difficulty in keeping contact with adjacent units, he would have enough reserve strength to extend his lines.

Lieutenant Colonel Chambers' 3/25 led the column, occupying 0-A by 0630. While the unit was reorganizing, the enemy counterattacked, triggering a violent fight that cost the Japanese 90

dead. Three successive commanders of Company K, the Marine unit hardest hit, were either killed or wounded, but the American attack quickly rolled forward. 0-B, only lightly defended, was captured, and by 1400, 3/25 had overcome increasing resistance to seize 0-C. During the advance, Colonel Batchelder had committed Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2d Battalion to seal a gap on the regimental right flank.

As Chambers' men approached 0-D, each of the two assault companies kept physical contact with elements of the flanking battalion, but not with each other, thus opening a hole in the center of the line. The battalion commander inserted his reserve into the gap, but he soon had to call for additional help, a company from Mustain's 1/25, to extend his line still farther to the right. The attack on 0-D was halted short of its goal by fire from caves dug into the ridge itself and from a patch of woods just south of the objective. The 3d Battalion had gained almost 2,000 yards during the day.

Late in the afternoon, an ammunition dump exploded near Chambers' observation post. The battalion commander was stunned by the blast, and Major James Taul, the executive officer, took over until the following day when Chambers resumed his duties. The major launched another attack toward 0-D, but his men were unable to dislodge the Japanese from the woods at the base of the objective.

While Colonel Batchelder's regiment was fighting for the succession of ridges within its zone, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines were advancing along the shore of Magicienne Bay. Gullies leading toward the beach and outcrop-

pings of rock slowed the unit, but Hart's men nevertheless made steady progress. Although the frequent detours caused by the broken terrain opened numerous gaps within the regiment, General Schmidt was more concerned about the difficulty that Hart's Marines were having in keeping contact with Batchelder's troops. At midday, he ordered the 23d Marines, the division reserve, into line between the two regiments.

At 1500, after marching 2,500 yards from its assembly area, Colonel Jones' regiment attacked in a column of battalions. Lieutenant Colonel Haas' 1/23 was in the lead; the 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Dillon, followed, while 3/23, commanded by Major Treitel, served as regimental reserve. The formidable terrain rather than the ineffectual enemy resistance slowed the advance, so that by dusk, 1/23 had halted some 200 yards south of the day's intermediate objective.

As darkness drew near, the 4th Marine Division completed adjusting its lines to thwart Japanese attempts at infiltration. On the right, 2/24 was inserted between the 1st and 3d Battalions, but this move did not restore the regimental line. Along the division boundary, the shift of one company from 3/25 caused Taul's battalion to lose contact with Lieutenant Colonel Tompkins' 1/29, on the right of the 2d Division. A company from 1/25 went into position to prevent the enemy from exploiting the break.

On 22 June, General Holland Smith decided to commit his corps reserve, the 27th Division. His operation order for that date fixed the next day's

objective. This line included the village of Laulau on the east, the central stronghold of Mt. Tapotchau, and a point on the west coast about 1,000 yards south of Garapan. General Ralph Smith's soldiers were to pass through the lines of the 25th Marines and at 1000 on 23 June attack toward this line. When the objective had been taken, the division would continue its effort upon order from Northern Troops and Landing Force. Since the corps commander was releasing the 106th Infantry to division control, General Ralph Smith elected to attack with two regiments abreast, Colonel Ayres' 106th on the left and Colonel Kelley's 165th on the right.

Holland Smith, on the afternoon of 22 June, decided that a single battalion should be able to clean up Nafutan Point. Ralph Smith felt otherwise, expressing belief that the Japanese might pierce the thin American line to storm Aslito field. Nevertheless, he prepared to execute the decision of his superior commander. At 2100 on 22 June, he issued a field order to 2/105, which was at that time in corps reserve, directing that unit and its attached tanks "to continue operations to mop-up remaining enemy detachments in the Nafutan Point area." After the Nafutan pocket had been reduced, the battalion would, read the Army general's directive, revert to corps control as corps reserve.

At 2330 on 22 June, the division CP received a practically identical order from the corps commander. It included the subject of reversion to corps control. There was just one difference between the two directives: Holland Smith indicated that the attack would

begin "at daylight," whereas Ralph Smith omitted those words. The corps commander subsequently objected that the Army general had issued an order to a unit not at the time under his tactical control. A relative fact was that the division commander had not been granted authority regarding use of the corps reserve.

This was Ralph Smith's second mistaken order to a unit not under his tactical control, the previous instance occurring on 21 June and also involving the 105th Infantry.

While preparations to resume the Nafutan Point mop up were underway, Colonels Ayres and Kelley were already selecting the routes which their regiments would follow to move into the front lines to the north. In the south, 2/105 extended its lines, while the remainder of the regiment reverted to corps reserve.³

On 22 June, the two Marine Divisions had advanced half the distance to the day's objective at a cost of 157 casualties.⁴ The Americans, however, now faced General Saito's main line of resistance. Here, the enemy had concentrated some 15,000 men, two-thirds of them from the *43d Division* and the remainder either sailors or stragglers whose "fighting ability is reduced by

³ NTLF OpO 10-44, dtd 22Jun44; NTLF G-3 Jnl, msg no. 743, dtd 1550, 23Jun44; 27th InfDiv FO No. 46, dtd 22Jun44; MajGen Ralph C. Smith, Notes on Ops of 27th Div at Saipan, Anx I to PreliminaryRpt on Ops of 27th Div at Saipan, dtd 11Jul44, Exhibit M to *Army Inquiry*; MajGen Ralph C. Smith memo to CG, NTLF, dtd 23Jun44, Subj: Hostile Forces on Nafutan Point, Exhibit VVV to *Army Inquiry*.

⁴ NTLF G-1 Rpt, App I in *NTLF OpRpt*.

lack of weapons.”⁵ When the NTLF attempted to overcome these defenders, the number of Americans killed and wounded was bound to soar.

At Nafutan Point, most of the day was spent in adjusting the front line. As a result of the shifting of its components, 2/105 had to yield some of the ground it already had captured. Opposing the reinforced battalion were approximately 1,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians, a force about equal in numbers to the Army unit.

On the morning of 22 June, Army Air Forces fighters (P-47 Thunderbolts) of the 19th Fighter Squadron landed at Aslito field. The planes, which had been launched from escort carriers, were refitted with launching racks and armed with rockets by ground crews already at the airstrip. By midafternoon, eight of the P-47s had taken off on their first support missions of the Saipan campaign.⁶

By Saipan standards, the night of 22-23 June was comparatively quiet. Four Japanese who attempted to infiltrate along the division boundary were killed in a hand-to-hand struggle. The 14th Marines and 106th Infantry were shelled by enemy batteries located near Mount Tapotchau, and artillery pieces on Tinian damaged an LST off the Green Beaches before they were silenced by counterbattery fire.

Japanese aircraft also saw action. Late in the afternoon, a torpedo plane scored a hit on the *Maryland*, forcing that battleship to steam to Pearl Har-

bor for repairs. A night aerial attack on the Charan Kanoa anchorage did no damage to American shipping.

23 JUNE: INCREASING RESISTANCE

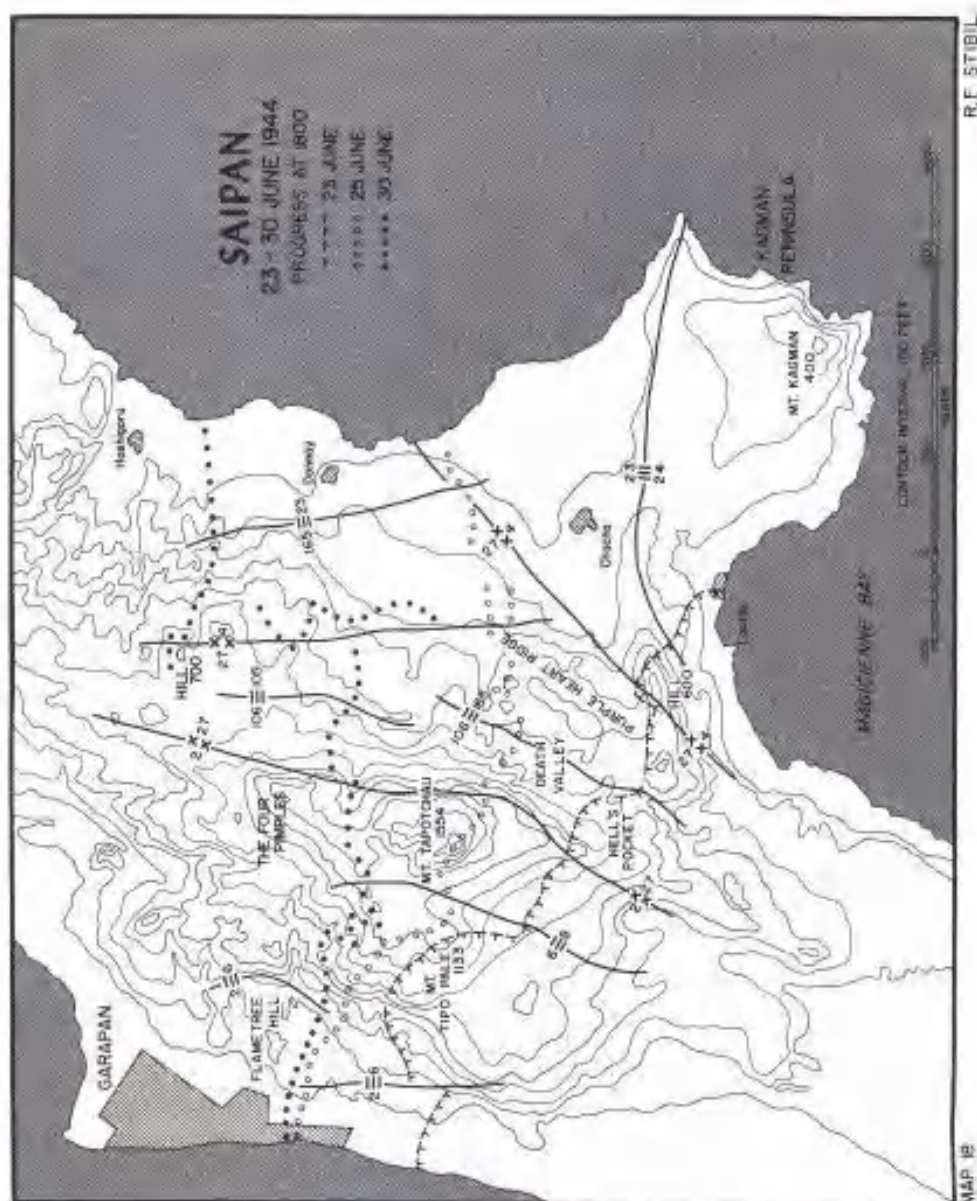
The corps attack of 23 June was a continuation of the previous day's effort. Once again, the 2d Marines served as pivot for the 2d Marine Division. In the adjacent 6th Marines zone, Lieutenant Colonel William K. Jones' 1/6 also held its ground to enable 3/6, commanded by Major Rentsch, to come abreast. The 3d Battalion advanced about 400 yards, but the pockets of resistance on Tipo Pale could not be eliminated. During the day, 2/2 was pinched out as the frontage became more narrow. This unit was returned to Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines in exchange for Major Hunt's 2/6, which was reunited with its parent regiment.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines benefited from an aerial search by observation planes of VMO-2 for routes leading to Mount Tapotchau. The reconnaissance disclosed a suitable supply road, but the observer also discovered that the only feasible avenue by which to approach the summit, a ridge near the division boundary, was dominated by a towering cliff not yet in American hands.

Resistance in the 8th Marines zone proved light at first, but the attack had to be halted at 1130 because the adjacent 106th Infantry had not yet crossed its line of departure. Until the Army regiment began moving forward, Tompkins' 1/29 would be unable to advance. At 1345, General Watson ordered the

⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1081.

⁶ AAF Hist Studies No. 38, OpHist of the Seventh AF, 6Nov43-31Jul44, p. 55 (MS at USAF Archives, Maxwell AFB, Ala.).



8th Marines to continue its attack. Colonel Wallace shifted Chamberlin's 2/8 to protect the exposed flank, and the Marines surged forward. Although 1/29 easily secured the cliff that barred the way to Mount Tapotchau, Lieutenant Colonel Hays' 1/8 collided with a force of 30 Japanese supported by six machine guns. These defenders, entrenched in a ravine at the left of the regimental zone, succeeded in halting the battalion advance.

As dusk approached, Chamberlin visited Major Almerin C. O'Hara at the 2/106 command post in an attempt to establish contact with the Army unit. General Ralph Smith soon arrived on the scene and permitted Chamberlin to borrow O'Hara's Company F in order to post it on the right flank of the 8th Marines. The officers involved reasoned that the Army battalion could more easily maintain contact with one of its own companies than with a Marine unit, but such was not the case. Although the additional company gave added protection to Wallace's flank, O'Hara could not extend far enough to the left to seal the opening, and for the next few days F/106 fought as a part of the 8th Marines.

The NTLF operation order for 23 June called for the 27th Infantry Division to assume responsibility for the center of the corps front by relieving the 25th Marines. The Marine regiment would then pass into Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve. The two Army regiments, the 106th and 165th Infantry, selected for the relief marched from their assembly areas at 0530, 4½ hours before the offensive was to begin. Within an hour, however, elements of the 165th

Infantry had cut across the road over which the other regiment was marching, and the approach had to be halted until the tangled units could be sorted out.

In spite of the confusion, 2/165 and 1/165, Colonel Kelley's assault battalions, were in position by 1000 in the right of what had been the 25th Marines zone. The colonel recalled that one of the Marine officers judged the combination of terrain and enemy within the zone to be "about the worst he had run into yet."⁷ To the front was a series of ridges and gullies that were dotted with camouflaged weapons positions. With the zone of the 106th Infantry on the left and parallel to the division line of advance was a steep slope, overshadowed by Mount Tapotchau and honeycombed with caves.⁸ The 165th Infantry launched its attack against this formidable defensive network at about 1015, but the adjacent Army regiment was not yet in position. Colonel Ayres' unit, arriving one company at a time, did not move forward until 1055.

Throughout the zone of the 27th Infantry Division, the enemy made a determined fight. Colonel Kelley, like Colonel Wallace of the 8th Marines, suspended his advance to enable the 106th Infantry to come abreast, but Colonel Ayres' soldiers were stopped at the regimental left, Ayres could not strongpoint dubbed Hell's Pocket. Although 2/106 was ordered into line on the regimental left, Ayers could not maintain physical contact with the

⁷ Testimony of Col Gerard W. Kelley, Exhibit PPP, p. 1, *Army Inquiry*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

company dispatched to the 8th Marines. The 165th Infantry, however, enjoyed some success, nearing the southern extremity of Purple Heart Ridge before being fought to a standstill.

The 4th Marine Division attacked with the 23d and 24th Marines on line. Lieutenant Colonel Dillon's 2/23 seized Hill 600. "This was very difficult terrain," reported the battalion commander, "and it was hard enough scaling the hill, let alone fighting up it."⁹ From the summit, Marine observers could view the whole of Kagman Peninsula, the area to be seized during the next phase of the battle. While Dillon's men were destroying the defenders of Hill 600 with grenades and flamethrowers, Colonel Hart's 24th Marines pushed all the way to Laulau. Because the adjacent 27th Infantry Division had been stalled, the 4th Marine Division line was echeloned to the left rear, extending from Laulau past Hill 600 to the right flank of the 165th Infantry.

The NTLF operations map was little changed from the previous day. Although the 2d Marine Division had made gains on either flank of Tipo Pale and the 4th Marine Division had advanced about 1,000 yards along the coast, the Army division had accomplished very little. At Nafutan Point, the situation was practically unchanged. At day's end, one platoon manned a temporary perimeter atop Mount Nafutan, but otherwise the battle position was the same as before. (See Map 18.)

⁹ 3/23 OpRpt, p. 3.

"THE COMMANDING GENERAL IS HIGHLY DISPLEASED"

During the afternoon of 23 June, General Watson had two rifle companies formed from among his divisional shore party units. As more of the cargo handlers became available, additional units would be formed to serve as part of the division reserve. Since the 2d Marine Division soon would be advancing upon Garapan, the 2d Marines removed the minefield sown to block the coastal road.

Northern Troops and Landing Force, like General Watson's headquarters, turned its attention to maintaining a strong reserve. The 25th Marines, relieved by the 27th Infantry Division, withdrew to Hill 500 to await further orders.

The headquarters area of the 10th Marines and its fire direction center were heavily shelled during the night. The regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph E. Forsyth, was killed and several key officers and non-commissioned officers were wounded. Communication facilities were badly damaged and 1/10 had to take over the direction of artillery support for the 2d Division. It was the 27th Infantry Division, however, that saw the fiercest action between darkness on 23 June and dawn of the 24th. Five of six Japanese tanks that attempted to knife along the boundary between the Army regiments were destroyed; a later enemy attack proved more damaging. Five tanks accompanied by infantry struck the lines of the 106th Infantry, and again all but one of the vehicles were destroyed. The survivor, however, burst through the American defenses to

set fire to a stockpile of ammunition. The resultant explosions forced the 3d Battalion to fall back until the flames had died away. An attack up the western slopes of Hill 600 was beaten off by the 23d Marines, assisted by 1/165. Japanese aerial attacks during the afternoon and evening accomplished nothing at the cost of two enemy planes, but an early morning raid on the vessels off Charan Kanoa resulted in 18 American casualties at no loss to the marauders.

Holland Smith was angered by the failure of the 27th Infantry Division to advance. During the afternoon of the 23d, as the attack was grinding to a halt, he had discussed the situation with Major General Sanderford Jarman, the Army officer in command of the Saipan garrison.¹⁰ The NTLF commander asked Jarman to visit Ralph Smith at the 27th Division command post to see what could be done to get the unit moving. Later Jarman recalled:

I talked to General [Ralph] Smith and explained the situation as I saw it and that I felt from reports from the corps commander that his division was not carrying its full share. He immediately replied that such was true; that he was in no way satisfied with what his regimental commanders had done during the day and that he had been with them and pointed out to them the situation. He further indicated to me that he was going to be present tomorrow, 24 June, with this division when it made its jump-off and he would personally see to it that the division went forward. . . . He appreciated the situation and thanked me for coming to see him and

stated that if he didn't take the division forward tomorrow he should be relieved.¹¹ Both Holland and Ralph Smith agreed that the Army division would have to press its attack more vigorously.

On the following morning, the Marine general sent a dispatch that left his Army subordinate with no doubts concerning his attitude toward the recent performance of the 27th Infantry Division:

Commanding General is highly displeased with the failure of the 27th Division . . . to launch its attack as ordered at King Hour [1000] and the lack of offensive action displayed by the division in its failure to advance and seize the objective 0-5 when opposed only by small-arms and mortar fire. . . .

The NTLF commander then pointed out that, because the 27th Infantry Division had failed to advance, the two Marine divisions were forced to suspend offensive operations to prevent "dangerous exposure of their interior flanks." Finally, he directed that "immediate steps" be taken to get the stalled Army unit moving forward.¹²

In stating that the 27th Infantry Division had been stopped by fire from small arms and mortars, Holland Smith underestimated the opposition which the soldiers had encountered. Tanks and mountain howitzers supported those portions of the *118th* and *136th Infantry Regiments* entrenched in front of the Army division. The strength of the *136th Infantry Regiment*, which also occupied positions in the 2d Marine Division zone, was less than 1,000 men. The other regiment, strung out from Mount Tapotchau to

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ MajGen Sanderford Jarman statement, dtd 23Jun44, p. 1, Exhibit J to *Army Inquiry*.

¹² CTF 56 disp to CG, 27th InfDiv, dtd 0836, 24Jun44, Exhibit G to *Army Inquiry*.

Magicienne Bay, was far under its peak strength of 2,600.¹³

Although their ranks had been seriously depleted, the defenders were posted on terrain ideal for their purpose. Any unit attempting to push rapidly along the floor of Death Valley would be exposed to fire from the slopes leading from Mount Tapotchau on the left and from Purple Heart Ridge on the right. On 23 June, Colonel Ayres, whose 106th Infantry zone included a portion of Tapotchau's slopes as well as part of the valley itself, had refrained from bypassing Hell's Pocket to advance across the level ground beyond. When asked what would have happened had he attacked vigorously up the valley, Ayres responded: "My candid opinion is that the regiment would have disappeared."¹⁴

Death Valley, then, was ringed with strong defenses, and the task facing Ralph Smith's division was more difficult than the corps commander realized at the time. Yet, the 27th Infantry Division commanding general, who had toured his front lines on 23 June, accepted Holland Smith's criticism, as reported by General Jarman, and admitted his own displeasure with the actions of some of his subordinates. Ralph Smith apparently believed that the fortifications to his front were strong but not impregnable. The next day's attack, he had vowed, would be both promptly and vigorously executed.

On the ground overlooking Death Valley, the Japanese were equally

determined to stop the renewed attack. General Saito's line was threatened in three places—around Tipo Pale, at the mouth of Death Valley, and along the shores of Magicienne Bay. In spite of this pressure from the front and the increasing bombardment of rear areas, General Saito was confident that his men would make the best possible use of the rugged terrain of Saipan. "The 43d Division units, with the firm decision to hold out until the last," the Saipan headquarters reported, "expect to smash the enemy."¹⁵

THE BATTLE RENEWED

The next objective of Northern Troops and Landing Force was a line extending from the southern part of Garapan due east to the opposite coast of the island. Between the present front lines and this distant objective lay Mount Tapotchau, Death Valley, Purple Heart Ridge, and the whole of Kagman Peninsula. The 2d Marine Division was to enter Garapan, advance some 2,000 yards beyond Mount Tipo Pale, and overrun Tapotchau. The 27th Infantry Division, would continue advancing on the 2d Marine Division right, while the 4th Marine Division would pivot to the east, capture Kagman Peninsula, and then pass into corps reserve. Thus, when the objective line was reached, the battle would enter a new phase, with two-thirds of Saipan in American hands and two divisions moving forward to secure the remainder.

On 24 June, the principal compo-

¹³ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 10,531, Excerpts from a Notebook of FOs.

¹⁴ Testimony of Col Russell G. Ayres, Exhibit CCC to *Army Inquiry*.

¹⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1092, dtd 23Jun44.

nents of Northern Troops and Landing Force were to begin their drive toward the objective. Colonel Batchelder's 25th Marines would remain in the area of Hill 500, sending out patrols to eliminate the Japanese lurking around Lake Susupe. At Nafutan Point, 2/105 was to continue its operations against the isolated Japanese pocket.

In the 2d Marine Division zone, General Watson ordered Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines to take the offensive. After a swift initial advance, the regiment encountered more vicious fighting as it neared the town. Lieutenant Colonel Kyle's 1st Battalion, on the right of Major Harold K. Throneson's 3/2, soon collided with a Japanese outpost located on a ridge southeast of Garapan. Fire from mortars and 105mm howitzers enabled the Marines to gain the crest, but the enemy promptly counter-attacked. Fortunately for the Americans, the north face of the ridge was so steep that it was almost impossible to scale. "Difficulties notwithstanding," one observer has written, "the Japanese made the effort; but, with two hands required to scale the slope and another to throw grenades or wave sabers, they were one hand short from the outset."¹⁶

After beating back the counterattack, the Marines began digging fox-holes overlooking Radio Road in the southern part of Garapan. The 3d Battalion was in the midst of its preparations for the night when seven enemy tanks, unprotected by infantry, charged from the ruined town. Medium tanks and self-propelled 75s destroyed six of the vehicles and sent the

seventh fleeing for cover. The arrival of the two-company provisional battalion that had been formed from among the shore party gave added depth to the regimental defenses.

In the center of the 2d Marine Division zone of action, 1/6 advanced 900 yards over comparatively open terrain, but 3/6, on the regimental right, was slowed by cliffs and ravines. The pocket north of Tipo Pale defied efforts to destroy it, but the southern and eastern slopes of the mountain were by now secured. Because the broken ground on the right had caused such uneven progress, Major Rentsch's 3/6 ended the day holding a 1,500-yard frontage. Since a rifle company from 2/2 and another from 2/6 had joined its three rifle companies on line, the 3d Battalion was able to establish contact throughout its zone.

On the division right, where the 8th Marines were battling toward Mount Tapotchau, Lieutenant Colonel Hays' 1/8 again attacked the pocket of resistance that had stopped the previous day's advance. While infantrymen attempted to keep the defenders pinned down, engineers armed with demolitions, rocket launchers, and flame-throwers crawled across the jagged coral to seal or burn enemy-infested caves. By late afternoon, the strongpoint had been reduced, freeing the battalion to continue its advance.

While Hays' men were eliminating the strongpoint within their zone, Major Larsen's 3/8 and, on the far right, Tompkins' 1/29 were approaching Tapotchau as rapidly as the terrain and the need to protect their flanks would permit. Tompkins' unit was pushing along an uneven plateau, a coral for-

¹⁶ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 141.

mation that resembled a stairway leading toward the mountain. Trees and vines choked a part of the battalion zone, and, as happened so often during the Saipan campaign, the unit became overextended. Colonel Wallace then ordered 2/8 to protect Tompkins' flank and also posted his 37mm antitank guns along the ridge separating the 2d Marine and 27th Infantry Divisions.

As the 2d Marine Division surged forward, General Ralph Smith launched an attack which, he believed, would redeem the failure of the day before. The results, however, were disappointing. On the right, Colonel Kelley detoured 3/165 through the area already overrun by the 23d Marines so that the battalion could take up a position on the eastern slopes of Purple Heart Ridge. Although the Army regiment gained little ground, it was now in position to exert pressure from two directions against the formidable ridge.

In spite of pressure from the division commanding general, the 106th Infantry again failed to penetrate beyond Hell's Pocket. The action was much sharper than before. Prior to its relief during the afternoon, 3/106 suffered 14 killed and 109 wounded, more than twice the number of casualties it had endured on the previous day. In summing up the action of 24 June, Colonel Ayres stated that his regiment had been "thrown back onto the original line of departure."¹⁷

Having for two days bloodied his fists against the gates of Death Valley, Ralph Smith now decided upon a new approach. By making an attack along Purple Heart Ridge, he hoped to knife

past the valley and establish firm contact with the Marine divisions, leaving one of Ayres' battalions to contain the bypassed Japanese.¹⁸ Holland Smith however, simultaneously issued orders to continue the attack up the valley.¹⁹ Before the two men had resolved this conflict, Ralph Smith had been relieved. General Jarman, the new commanding general, would decide to try the scheme of maneuver proposed by his predecessor.

While the main body of the 27th Infantry Division was hammering at the defenses to its front, the battalion at Nafutan Point was making little headway. On 25 June, 2/105 was to continue its attack under the command of Colonel Geoffrey M. O'Connell, chief of staff of the island garrison force. Responsibility for reducing the stronghold now rested with the Saipan Garrison Force.²⁰

On 24 June, General Schmidt's 4th Marine Division began pivoting toward Kagman Peninsula. The 23d Marines, on the left, moved around an enemy outpost near Hill 66 to advance onto the peninsula itself. This turning movement, carried out against moderate resistance, exposed the left flank of the unit, which was separated by almost 1,000 yards from the positions held by the adjacent 165th Infantry. The 24th Marines, turning on a shorter radius, kept pace, so that by dusk the

¹⁸ 27th InfDiv FO No. 48, dtd 1800, 24Jun44.

¹⁹ NTLF OpO 12-44, dtd 1800, 24Jun44.

²⁰ CG, NTLF ltr Concerning Conduct of Ops by 2/105 in the Nafutan Point Area, Exhibit H to *Army Inquiry*; Col Geoffrey M. O'Connell memo to Gen Richardson, dtd 2Jul44, Subj: Ops of 2/105, Saipan, on Nafutan Point, p. 1, Exhibit WW to *Army Inquiry*.

¹⁷ Ayres Testimony, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

division front lines formed an arc that encompassed almost one-third of Kagman Peninsula.

To the weary Japanese, the oncoming Marines seemed invincible. General Saito's chief of staff reported that "300-400 troops along with four or five tanks have broken through Chacha in the area of the eastern foot of Tapotchau [near the base of Kagman Peninsula]." He went on to confess that, though the 43d Division was doing its best, the forces in the area were "reduced to the condition where we cannot carry out this plan [holding the cross-island line] with our present fighting strength." The enemy officer then repeated a call for reinforcements which he had made on the previous day.²¹

THE RELIEF OF GENERAL RALPH SMITH²²

In his conversation with General Jarman, Holland Smith had predicted that summary relief of an Army officer, if such an incident should take place, was bound to stir up a controversy. On 24 June, however, the corps commander decided, come what may, to embark on "one of the most disagreeable tasks I have ever been forced to perform."²³ The Marine general, in a conference with Admirals Turner and Spruance, stated the problem, and Spruance, the overall commander, directed Holland Smith to replace Ralph Smith with

Jarman.²⁴ "No other action," the Fifth Fleet commander later observed, "seemed adequate to accomplish the purpose."²⁵

In requesting authority to relieve Ralph Smith from command of the 27th Infantry Division, Holland Smith stated that such action was necessary to give the corps commander "sufficient authority to cause Army units within landing forces to conduct operations in accordance with his own tactical orders." As examples of his subordinate's failure to follow orders, the Marine general cited the two instances, on 21 and 22 June, when Ralph Smith had issued instructions to units under corps control and the fact that the attack of 23 June had been delayed because of the late arrival of components of the 27th Infantry Division.²⁶ The basic reasons he stressed, however, for this drastic action were the "defective performance" of the Army division and its need of "a leader would make it toe the mark."²⁷

No sooner had the relief been accomplished than the expected storm of

²⁴ *Moore comments Saipan*. At this same meeting, the three officers decided to maintain the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade as floating reserve for possible use at Saipan and to send the 3d Marine Division to Eniwetok, where it would await the Guam operation.

²⁵ Comdr Fifth Flt ltr to CinCPOA, dtd 29Jun44, Subj: Summary of Events Leading up to the Relief from Command of Major General Ralph C. Smith, p. 1, Exhibit C to *Army Inquiry*.

²⁶ CG, ExpeditionaryTrps ltr to CTF 51, dtd 24Jul44, Subj: Authority to Relieve Army Officers from Command, Exhibit D to *Army Inquiry*.

²⁷ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 173; *Moore comments Saipan*.

²¹ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1096.

²² An Army-oriented account of the relief and the controversy that followed is contained in Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, pp. 191-201.

²³ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 173.

controversy began to break. Although not included in the chain of command for the Marianas operation, Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr., ranking Army officer in the Central Pacific, apparently was angered that the change had been made without his knowledge. When Ralph Smith reached Hawaii, Richardson appointed him, as a gesture of confidence, commanding general of the 98th Infantry Division. The Army lieutenant general also convened a board of officers to inquire into the circumstances surrounding what some of his fellow officers considered "the slur on their service implied by the relief of Ralph Smith."²⁸

The board, headed by Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., could examine only those reports contained in Army files and hear testimony only from Army officers. Yet, in spite of its *ex parte* nature, the Buckner board concluded that Holland Smith had the authority to relieve his Army subordinate and that he issued in a proper fashion the orders effecting that relief. The investigators, however, objected that the Marine general, unaware of the resistance that the 27th Infantry Division had encountered, had taken action that was "not fully justified by the facts."²⁹ The report of the board proceedings also contained recommendations that Ralph Smith's future assignments not be adversely affected by the Saipan incident, that the senior Army commander be fully informed of theater and JCS policies concerning command relationships, and finally

that "when it is necessary to combine elements of two or more services into one major unit, the most careful consideration be given to the personality and qualifications of the senior commanders concerned."³⁰ The Army board thus implied that Holland Smith, though his action was legally correct, had been more vigorous than circumstances warranted. The Marine general, the board members appear to have believed, was singularly lacking in tact.

Upon studying the Buckner report, certain of General Marshall's advisers, though they did not approve of Holland Smith's action, admitted that the 27th Infantry Division had not been performing as well as it should have been, principally because certain of Ralph Smith's subordinates lacked vigor. These officers nonetheless believed that the relief of the division commanding general was not necessary.³¹ Once again, the Marine general's judgment and tact were questioned rather than his right to effect a change of command.

During the hearings, General Richardson visited Saipan, ostensibly to inspect Army forces, and engaged in a heated argument with Holland Smith. The spirit of harmony that had so far characterized the Central Pacific campaign was fast evaporating. In order to remove the occasion of the friction, the War Department had Ralph Smith recalled from Hawaii and eventually assigned to the European Theater of Operations. After Saipan had been declared secured, Holland Smith assumed command of Fleet Marine Force,

²⁸ Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 192.

²⁹ Rpt of Army Inquiry, p. 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 195.

Pacific, a post in which he would have no control over Army divisions. No effort was made, however, to alter the command structure for the imminent Guam operation. There the untested 77th Infantry Division would fight effectively when included with Marine units in a corps commanded by Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger.

The Saipan controversy, by no means typical of interservice relations in the Pacific, seemed destined to be fought to its conclusion in an atmosphere of comparative secrecy. Unfortunately, somewhat distorted accounts of Ralph Smith's relief slipped past the censors to touch off a journalistic battle that flared intermittently until 1948. The volcano of adverse publicity that erupted after the Saipan campaign, specifically the article in *Time* magazine that claimed the soldiers "froze in their foxholes"³² at the entrance to Death Valley, had a crushing effect on the morale of the 27th Infantry Division. The story itself caused a flood of anger, but the arrival of letters from friends and relatives in the United States, who accepted the article as completely accurate, was a cruel blow to the men of the division.³³

In November 1944, after the entire Marianas operation had ended, General Marshall suggested to Admiral King that both Nimitz and Richardson, as senior representatives of their services in the Central Pacific, should thoroughly investigate the incident in order to prevent future discord. King refused, for he believed that Richardson's

previous inquiry had prolonged the strife instead of ending it. In the opinion of the Chief of Naval Operations, the record of the Buckner board contained intemperate outbursts against Holland Smith, and statements that did not pertain to the issue under investigation. The admiral was convinced that any new inquiry would degenerate into a clash of personalities, and Marshall apparently adopted a similar point of view, for no further official action was taken.³⁴

The Smith against Smith controversy was caused by failure of the 27th Infantry Division to penetrate the defenses of Death Valley. Holland Smith had told the division commanding general that operations in the area had to be speeded up. Ralph Smith, who was thoroughly familiar with the tactical situation, informed Jarman of his own annoyance with the slow progress of his unit. He told the island commander that he intended to press the attack, but he postponed making the changes in command which, according to Jarman, he intimated might be necessary. The NTLF commander, after stating that the objective had to be taken, saw that no significant progress had been made on 24 June and promptly replaced the officer responsible for the conduct of the Army division. The Army Smith offered his subordinates another chance, but the Marine Smith did immediately what he felt was necessary, without regard for the controversy he knew would follow.

³² *Time*, v. 44, no. 12 (18Sep44), p. 26.

³³ Love, *The 27th InfDiv History*, pp. 522-523.

³⁴ CofS, USA memo for Adm King, dtd 22 Nov44; FAdm King memo for Gen Marshall, dtd 23Nov44, Subj: Article in *Time* magazine (Smith-Smith File, HistBr, HQMC); Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 196.

25 JUNE: MOUNT TAPOTCHAU
AND KAGMAN PENINSULA

During the evening of 24 June, as the relief of Ralph Smith was taking place, Japanese planes attacked ships clustered off Saipan. Neither antiaircraft guns nor Army night fighters (P-61 Black Widows) in the first of 105 sorties these planes would fly during the campaign, were able to down any of the attackers. The Japanese bombs, however, did no damage.³⁵

Ashore, the enemy made repeated attempts to infiltrate the lines of General Watson's 2d Marine Division. Colonel Stuart's 2d Marines, which saw sporadic action through the night, killed 82 Japanese at a cost of 10 casualties. Enemy artillery and mortar fire forced Major Rentsch, in command of 3/6, to find a new location for his command post and disrupted the battalion communications. Elsewhere the night was quiet, although marred from time to time by the flash of rifle fire or the bursting of a grenade as Japanese attempted to slip through the corps lines.

Although little ground was captured on 25 June by elements of the 2d Marine Division, General Watson's troops dealt the Japanese a jarring blow. While the 2d Marines stood fast on the outskirts of Garapan and the 6th Marines hammered at the Tipo Pale pocket of resistance, the 8th Marines captured Tapotchau, the finest observation post in central Saipan. During the attack against this key height, some 200 members of the shore party finished their tasks at the beaches and formed

replacement units for the 6th and 8th Marines.

Some portion of Tapotchau's bulk lay in the zone of each of the four battalions of Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines. The western slopes were to the front of the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hays, and Major Larsen's 3d Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Tompkins faced the arduous task of leading his 1/29, still attached to the 8th Marines, directly toward the summit, while 2/8, under Major Chamberlin, had responsibility for securing the eastern slopes. Two routes led toward the mountain crest. Tompkins was to attack through the densely wooded valley and up the steep southern face. Chamberlin would follow the ridge in his sector until abreast of Tapotchau and then veer to the left, advancing up the eastern slope.

By 0930, after two hours of fighting, 1/29 became bogged down in the woods, halted by impassable terrain and enemy fire. On the right, however, 2/8 pushed rapidly to the cliff that marked the eastern terminus of the crescent-shaped mountain. Chamberlin ordered one platoon to scale the cliff, and this unit encountered no opposition. A smaller patrol advanced almost to the crest without being challenged. Since Hays and Larsen were maintaining unceasing pressure on the Japanese defending the western slopes, Tompkins decided to move to his right, pass through Chamberlin's lines, and approach the summit from the east rather than from the south.

Taking with him a detachment from the division reconnaissance company, the commander of 1/29 moved through the adjacent zone of action, scaled the

³⁵ AAF Hist Studies no. 38, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

cliff, and gained the summit. He then left the scouts to hold the objective and returned to his battalion. During the afternoon, Tompkins withdrew two of his three rifle companies from contact with the enemy. Companies A and C formed in single file for the march to the crest of the mountain, while Company B remained in the valley.

While Tompkins was shifting his main body, the Japanese awoke to the danger and launched a series of counterattacks against the perimeter manned by the reconnaissance detachment. During the afternoon, the enemy suffered 40 casualties and the Marines 3. The Japanese also turned upon the platoon which Chamberlin had posted atop the cliff. A violent concentration of mortar fire forced the 2/8 unit to fall back from its exposed position, but this withdrawal did not affect Tompkins' plans.

The sun was about to set by the time 1/29 was ready to climb the mountain. The battalion 81mm mortars blanketed the northern slopes with smoke, while Chamberlin's mortars and 105s of 3/10 blasted possible enemy positions. Tompkins' riflemen ascended the cliff, crossed the pinnacle at the eastern end of the hill mass, passed through a saddle, and moved up the gradual slope leading to the summit. Not a man was lost during the climb.

Atop the mountain, the Marines found that their entrenching tools could scarcely dent the rocky surface. The fortunate few whose positions were located on patches of soft earth scratched out foxholes, but the rest used loose stones to build low parapets over which to fire. Shortly before midnight, the Japanese attacked from the

northwest. The hastily prepared defenses proved adequate, as evidenced by the 18 Japanese dead discovered the following morning.³⁶

In the center of the island, the 27th Infantry Division, now commanded by General Jarman, attempted to bypass and isolate Death Valley. The 2d Battalion of Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry captured the southern third of Purple Heart Ridge, then yielded its conquests in order to obtain a better defensive position. Meanwhile, 3/165, poised to attack to the west from positions along the division right boundary, had been halted by a pocket of resistance. Since the 3d Battalion could make no headway, Colonel Kelley ordered the unit to swing through the area already cleared by the 4th Marine Division in order to establish contact with the 23d Marines. By nightfall, the Army battalion was digging in astride the division boundary just west of the Chacha-Donnay road. (See Map 18.)

Colonel Ayres' 106th Infantry, less the 2d Battalion which was maintaining pressure on the southern entrance to Death Valley, had the mission of circling to the right of Purple Heart Ridge and making contact with the 2d Marine Division in the vicinity of Mount Tapotchau. Had this maneuver succeeded, the powerful strongpoint would have been isolated and an integrated corps front restored. Unfortunately, the enveloping force did not

³⁶ In addition to the reports of the units involved, the account of the capture of Mount Tapotchau is based on Capt James R. Stockman, "The Taking of Mount Tapotchau," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 30, no. 7 (Jul46).

reach its attack position until midafternoon. The 1st Battalion attempted to advance to the northwest along the road leading from Chacha across the valley, but the drive was stopped by enemy fire. The remainder of Ayres' maneuver element, 3/106, started toward Chacha, was delayed by road traffic, and elected to return to its original assembly area south of Death Valley. The 2d Battalion, in the meantime, pushed directly into the valley, enjoyed brief success, but finally was driven back to its line of departure.

Although Jarman's plan had failed, the 4th Marine Division managed to overrun Kagman Peninsula. General Schmidt's attack was delayed 45 minutes, for the supporting tanks had difficulty in negotiating the trails leading to the front lines. At 0815, the 23d and 24th Marines crossed the line of departure to begin their surge toward Mount Kagman and the coast. Although Colonel Hart's 24th Marines swept forward against extremely weak opposition, Colonel Jones' 23d Marines encountered a number of stragglers and was taken under fire by a field piece located in the 27th Infantry Division zone. After coordinating with the Army unit, the 14th Marines opened fire and succeeded in temporarily silencing the weapon.³⁷ By late afternoon, the entire peninsula was in American hands, but the task of mopping up had just begun.

The day's fighting in central Saipan resulted in important gains. Although the attackers had been unable

to seal off Death Valley, Tapotchau had fallen and organized resistance on Kagman Peninsula had been shattered. At Nafutan Point, however, the Japanese made good use of broken terrain and heavy underbrush to stall 2/105, but not until after the battalion had pierced the main defenses. During the afternoon, the 40mm and 90mm antiaircraft guns assigned, on the previous day, to support Colonel O'Connell's troops, registered to fire air bursts in preparation for the attack of 26 June.³⁸

The night of 25 June saw the foiling of a Japanese attempt to send reinforcements from Tinian. An infantry company, moving on 11 barges toward the Saipan coast east of Chacha, was detected by the destroyer USS *Bancroft* and the destroyer escort USS *Elden*. One of the barges was reportedly sunk, while the others were frightened back to Tinian.

Except for that incident and the fight atop Mount Tapotchau, the night was quiet. The defenders had been seriously weakened by 11 days of sustained fighting. Even had the Japanese troops been rested and more numerous, the lack of communications probably would have prevented a coordinated counterattack.

During 25 June, the Japanese *Thirty-first Army* Headquarters could account for a total of about 950 combat troops remaining in the *135th*, *136th*, and *118th Infantry Regiments*. The *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* was believed reduced to 100 men and the *7th Independent Engineer Regiment* to approximately 70 effectives. The *3d Independent Mountain Artillery Regi-*

³⁷ Later, when this piece opened fire again, a patrol of the 23d Marines destroyed gun and crew. *Jones ltr.*

³⁸ O'Connell memo, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 3.

ment had no field pieces, and the 9th Tank Regiment only three tanks.³⁹ These estimates took into account only those Army units in communication with Saito's headquarters. Many other detachments, isolated from the army command post, were fighting savagely. Yet, to General Saito the destruction of the Japanese garrison force seemed inevitable. "Please apologize deeply to the Emperor," he asked of Tokyo headquarters, "that we cannot do better than we are doing."⁴⁰

26 JUNE: THE ADVANCE BEYOND TIPO PALE

The action on 26 June centered around Tipo Pale, where the 6th Marines had been stalled since the afternoon of the 22d. Instead of attacking along the stubbornly defended draw, Colonel Riseley's regiment bypassed the pocket, left one company to mop up, and continued advancing to the north. Lieutenant Colonel Jones' 1st Battalion moved into position to support by fire the capture of the next objective, a ridge that extended west from Mount Tapotchau. While crossing an open field, 2/6 came under deadly fire from the ridge and was forced to break off the action.

East of Tipo Pale, Tompkins' 1/29 strengthened its hold on the summit of Tapotchau. The company left behind in the valley succeeded in joining the rest of the battalion, but a patrol sent to the northernmost pinnacle of the jagged mountain was beaten back by the Japanese. Elsewhere in the 8th

Marines zone, progress was slow. Along the western approaches to Mount Tapotchau, the 1st and 3d Battalions battled through dense woods to drive the enemy from a seemingly endless succession of ravines and knolls. For most of the day, these Marines clawed their way forward, dodging grenades and often diving for cover to protect themselves from the plunging fire of machine guns. East of the mountain, 2/8 extended its lines to the rear along the rim of Death Valley, but Chamberlin's battalion, with its adopted Army company, could not make physical contact with the 106th Infantry.

At the entrance to Death Valley, the battle was beginning again. After gaining ground on the previous day, 2/106 had fallen back under cover of darkness to its original position. General Jarman decided to shift slightly the axis of his main attack, but the most difficult tasks again were assigned to the 106th Infantry. While the 1st Battalion tried to reduce Hell's Pocket, the other two battalions, instead of circling completely around the valley, were to attack along the western slope of Purple Heart Ridge, then extend to the left in order to close the gap in the corps front. Meanwhile, 2/165 was to mop up the eastern slope of the ridge.

The attack of the 106th Infantry got off to a confused start, and for this reason General Jarman decided to entrust the regiment to Colonel Albert K. Stebbins, his chief of staff.⁴¹ By the end of the day the 2d and 3d Battalions occupied all but the northern tip of the ridge. The defenders of Hell's Pocket,

³⁹ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 1097.

⁴¹ Jarman Statement, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.



MARINES DIG IN *night defensive positions on 24 June as the attack moves northward on Saipan.* (USN 80-G-234720)



COMPANY CP *in the smoking ruins of Garapan stays in close touch with its attacking platoons.* (USMC 85174)

however, hurled 1/106 back on its line of departure.

The 4th Marine Division, charged with mopping up Kagman Peninsula, had been pinched out of the corps line to revert to Northern Troops and Landing Force reserve. Although harassed by artillery fire from enemy batteries in the vicinity of Death Valley, the Marines wiped out the Japanese forces that had survived the fighting of 24 and 25 June. As General Schmidt's troops were assembling at the close of day, the division, less the 25th Marines at Hill 500, was ordered to re-enter the lines. In place of the 25th Marines, General Schmidt was given Colonel Kelley's 165th Infantry, now composed of 1/165, 3/165, and 1/105.

The 26th of June also marked the beginning of the systematic hammering of Tinian by ships and planes as well as by artillery. Since 20 June, 155mm guns, first a battery and then an entire battalion, had been shelling the adjacent island. Now aircraft and cruisers joined in the bombardment. Tinian was divided into two sectors. Each day, the planes would alternate with the ships in blasting both portions of the island. XXIV Corps Artillery was to fire upon any suitable targets not destroyed by the other arms. The naval shelling, however, proved unsatisfactory, for the guns of the cruisers were ill-suited to area bombardment.

SEVEN LIVES FOR ONE'S COUNTRY ⁴²

Operations at Nafutan Point were speeded on 26 June, for O'Connell's

men already had broken the enemy's main defensive line. Advancing against light opposition and supported by antiaircraft weapons, tanks, and naval gunfire, the soldiers secured Mount Nafutan. Late in the afternoon, the Japanese, their backs to the sea, began resisting more vigorously. Since the attacking companies had limited fields of fire, they withdrew before digging positions for the night. The American line was porous, with a gap on the left flank, and no more than a line of outposts on the right.

The enemy's slow response to the pressure applied by the Army battalion did not indicate that these disorganized Japanese were beaten. Captain Sasaki, commander of the *317th Infantry Battalion* of the ill-fated *47th Independent Mixed Brigade* gathered together some 500 soldiers and sailors, survivors from the various units that had helped defend southern Saipan, and issued orders to break out at midnight from the Nafutan Point trap. The men, "after causing confusion at the airfield," were to assemble at Hill 500, formerly the site of brigade headquarters but now the bivouac area of the 25th Marines. "Casualties will remain in their present positions and defend Nafutan Mount," Sasaki continued. "Those who cannot participate in combat must commit suicide. Password for the night of 26 June [is] *Shichi Sei Hokoku*, (Seven Lives for One's Country)." ⁴³

The enemy passed undetected through O'Connell's line of outposts. The first indication of a *banzai* attack

⁴² An additional source for this section is: O'Connell memo, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Quoted in NTLF G-2 Rpt, p. 34, in *NTLF OpRpt*.

came when a group of Japanese attacked the command post of 2/105. The marauders were driven off after killing 4 Americans and wounding 20 others at the cost of 27 Japanese dead. At 0230, the main force stormed across Aslito field, destroying one P-47 and damaging two others.⁴⁴ Three hours later, the Japanese reached Hill 500, where the 25th Marines greeted them with a deadly barrage of grenades and bullets. Fragments of Sasaki's group struck positions manned by the 14th Marines and 104th Field Artillery, but both units held firm.

On 27 June the 25th Marines mopped up the Japanese who had survived the night's action, while 2/105 overran the remainder of Nafutan Point. The soldiers discovered some 550 bodies within their zone. Some of the dead had been killed during the earlier fighting; others had committed suicide in obedience to Sasaki's instructions. Thus, in a burst of violence, ended the wearisome battle for Nafutan Point.

27 JUNE: THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

Considering the effect it had upon the Japanese in central Saipan, the Nafutan Point action might as well have been fought on another planet. If General Saito was aware that 1,000 members of his Saipan garrison had perished within the space of a few days, such knowledge could not have altered his plans. The general already had selected his final line of resistance, a line that stretched diagonally across

the island from Tanapag village past Tarahoho to the opposite coast. Here the battle would be fought to its conclusion.⁴⁵ (See Map 19.)

On 27 June, the 2d Marine Division, composed of the 2d, 6th, and 8th Marines plus 1/29, readjusted its lines. Along the coast, the 2d Marines waited for orders to seize the town of Garapan. North of Tipo Pale, the 6th Marines repulsed an early morning counter-attack, moved forward, but again was stopped short of the ridge that had previously stalled its advance. On the right, 1/29 secured the remainder of Mount Tapotchau, while 2/8 sent patrols into the area east of the mountain. During the morning, Lieutenant Colonel Hudson's 2/25 passed to control of the 2d Marine Division. General Watson attached the battalion to Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines. Hudson's men then relieved Chamberlin's troops of responsibility for guarding the division right flank.

In the 27th Infantry Division zone, the 106th Infantry made important gains. Two rifle companies of the 1st Battalion circled around Hell's Pocket to gain the crest of the ridge that formed the division left boundary. Meanwhile, at the northern end of Death Valley, the 2d and 3d Battalions succeeded in forming a line across the valley floor. On the eastern slopes of Purple Heart Ridge, 2/165 pushed forward to dig in to the right of 2/106.

Although the advance of the Army division had been encouraging, the most spectacular gains of the day were those made by the 4th Marine Division. On the east coast, the 23d Marines by-

⁴⁴ AAF Hist Studies No. 38, *op. cit.*, p. 59; USAF Comments.

⁴⁵ *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1120.

passed a minefield and advanced against intermittent fire to overrun the villages of Donnay and Hashigoru, capture a supply dump, and gain its portion of the corps attack objective. The attached 165th Infantry, made up of 1/165, 3/165, and 1/105, fared almost as well. By dusk, General Schmidt's lines ran west from the coast and then curved toward the division left boundary, along which 1/165 had encountered stubborn resistance. To maintain contact between that battalion and the units at Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge, 2/24 was shifted to the 4th Marine Division left flank.

By the coming of darkness on 27 June, the gaps which had marred the corps front were well on their way to being closed. Although Japanese planes bombed both the Charan Kanoa roadstead and Aslito field, there was little infiltration during the night. A truck loaded with 12 enemy soldiers and civilians drove toward the lines held by the 23d Marines, but an antitank gun destroyed the vehicle and killed its occupants. On Purple Heart Ridge, 2/165 was shelled and its commander wounded. Sporadic mortar fire fell in the lines of the 2d Marines near Garampan, but, all in all, the night was quiet.

28 JUNE: MAINTAINING PRESSURE ON THE ENEMY

The Japanese, under steady pressure all along the front, were now preparing defenses to make the area north of Donnay and around Tarahoho secure. While these positions were being completed, those elements of the 118th and 136th Infantry Regiments that were opposing the 27th Infantry Division

were to fight to the death. Checking the rapid advance of the 4th Marine Division was the task assigned the 9th Expeditionary Unit and a 100-man detachment from the 9th Tank Regiment.⁴⁶

The tempo of action in the 2d Marine Division zone remained fairly slow during 28 June. While the 2d Marines conducted limited patrols, aircraft, supporting warships, and artillery pounded suspected strongpoints which might be encountered when the regiment resumed its advance. One preparatory air strike resulted in 27 Marine casualties, when a pilot mistook a puff of smoke for the bursting of the white phosphorous shell that was to mark his target and accidentally fired his rockets into a position manned by 1/2.

The 6th Marines made scant progress, for the 2d Battalion could not drive the Japanese from the ridge to its front. The longest gain made by Colonel Riseley's regiment was about 200 yards. To the rear, however, the bypassed Tipo Pale pocket was at last completely destroyed.

Colonel Wallace's 8th Marines, with 2/25 again withdrawn to corps control, found itself up against a formidable barrier, four small hills, one lying within the zone of each battalion. Because of their size in comparison to Tapotchau, the hills were dubbed the Four Pimples. To make identification easier, each of them was given the nickname of the commander of the battalion that was to capture it. Thus, Major William C. Chamberlin of 2/8 was responsible for Bill's Pimple, Lieutenant

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 1123.

Colonel Rathvon McC. Tompkins of 1/29 for Tommy's Pimple, Major Stanley E. Larsen of 3/8 for Stan's Pimple, and Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence C. Hays, Jr., of 1/8 for Larry's Pimple. (See Map 18.)

As the 8th Marines approached the four hills, enemy resistance increased, so that darkness found the regiment short of its objective. Chamberlin's 2d Battalion faced an especially difficult problem in logistics. Because of the rugged terrain, eight stretcher bearers were needed to evacuate one wounded Marine. Thus, a single bullet or grenade could immobilize most of a rifle squad. The battalion, however, did not passively accept enemy fire, for 100 Japanese perished during the day.

Beyond the ridge to the right, Army units again attempted to come abreast of the Marine divisions. Major General George W. Griner, dispatched from Hawaii by General Richardson, assumed command of the 27th Infantry Division on the morning of 28 June, and General Jarman returned to his assigned duties with the garrison force. Griner's first day of command on Saipan saw the 106th Infantry push a short distance forward in the north, at the same time crushing organized resistance in the bypassed Hell's Pocket. The regimental gains were made costly by accurate mortar fire and by a daring enemy foray in which two tanks killed or wounded 73 members of the 1st and 2d Battalions.

Because of the accumulated losses, Griner shifted his units. With only 100 riflemen present for duty,⁴⁷ 3/106

was replaced by the 1st Battalion of the 106th. Company F, which had been under Marine control, now returned to 2/106. On the right, 3/105, idle since its relief at Nafutan Point, entered the battle. With the new battalion came the regimental headquarters, and, as a result, 2/165, which was trying to destroy the knot of resistance at the northern tip of Purple Heart Ridge, was detached from Stebbins' command and attached to the 105th Infantry.

The 4th Marine Division, which had made such impressive gains on the 27th, paused to adjust its lines. While the 23d Marines sent patrols 500 yards to its front, the 165th Infantry occupied Hill 700 at the corner of the division's zone of action. Neither regiment encountered serious opposition, but Colonel Kelley was wounded by mortar fragments and replaced in command of the Army unit by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph T. Hart. Along the left boundary, the attached Army regiment, assisted by 1/24 and 3/24, was unable to make physical contact with General Griner's division. At dusk on 28 June, the 4th Marine Division lines formed an inverted L, with the 23d Marines and part of 3/165 facing north, while the rest of 3/165, 1/105, and the two battalions of the 24th Marines faced west.

The darkness of 28-29 June was pierced by the flash of rifles, bursting of grenades, and explosion of aerial bombs. Once again enemy planes raided both the anchorage and the airfield. In a typical night action, the 6th Marines killed 10 members of a

⁴⁷ 106th Inf Jnl, msg no. 609, dtd 1010, 28

Jun44 (WW II RecsDiv, FRC, Alexandria, Va.).

Japanese patrol. The 23d Marines, however, encountered an unusual situation when a 10-truck enemy convoy, lights ablaze, came rumbling toward the front lines. The Japanese realized where they were heading and beat a hasty retreat before the Marines could open fire.

SUCCESS IN DEATH VALLEY

On 29 and 30 June, the corps line remained almost stationary on its flanks, even though the fighting still blazed in its center. "With the operation two weeks old, *everyone* on the island felt the weight of fatigue settling down," a historian of the campaign has written. The Japanese after a succession of bloody reverses, were badly worn, and the American divisions resembled "a runner waiting for his second wind."⁴⁸

Although tired, the Marines and soldiers were determined to finish the grim job at hand. Near Garapan, this determination resulted in a cleverly delivered blow against a formidable Japanese redoubt. About 500 yards in front of the 2d Marines lines, an enemy platoon had entrenched itself on Flametree Hill. During the day, the defenders remained in caves masked by the orange-red foliage that covered the hill. If the regiment should attempt to advance through Garapan, the Japanese could emerge from cover and rake the attackers with devastating fire. Either the enemy had to be lured onto the exposed slopes and scourged with long-range fire, or the hill itself would have

to be captured, probably at a large cost to the attackers.

On the morning of 29 June, Marine artillery blasted Flametree Hill, and machine guns raked the tree-covered slope, while mortars placed a smoke screen in front of the objective. When the barrage stopped, the defenders dashed from their caves to repel the expected assault. Since rifle fire could be heard from beyond the smoke, the Japanese opened fire. Suddenly the American mortars began lobbing high explosives onto the hill, the machine guns resumed firing, and artillery shells equipped with time fuzes started bursting over the trenches. When the deluge of bullets and shell fragments ended, the weapons on Flametree Hill were silent.

Another accident befell the 2d Marines on 30 June. A Navy torpedo plane, damaged by enemy fire, crashed into the positions of 1/2, injuring seven infantrymen. The pilot escaped by taking to his parachute at an extremely low altitude.

During the last two days of June, the 6th Marines patrolled the area to its front. Colonel Riseley's men made no spectacular gains, but the 3d Battalion managed at last to seize the ridge from which the enemy had blocked the advance. Major Rentsch's troops gained a foothold on 29 June and, on the following day, secured the remainder of the objective. The capture of this ridge, which lay just north of Tapotchau, placed the regiment "on commanding ground in the most favorable position for continuation of the attack since D-Day."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hoffman, *Saipan*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ *2nd MarDiv OpRpt*, Sec VI, p. 19.

The 8th Marines devoted these two days to finding a route over which tanks could move forward to support the attack against the Four Pimples. On 30 June, while moving toward Stan's Pimple, the 3d Battalion captured a road which could be improved adequately by bulldozers. On the far right, Chamberlin's 2/8 overcame light resistance and seized Bill's Pimple late in the afternoon of the 30th. The other hills, though blasted by shells and rockets, remained in enemy hands. Prospects for the 8th Marines, however, seemed excellent, for by the evening of 30 June, Army and Marine tanks had reached the front lines, supplies were arriving to sustain the regiment, and the gap along the division boundary was being patrolled by elements of the 106th Infantry.

The 2d Marine Division, which had suffered 4,488 casualties since D-Day, was employing all three of its regiments on line when the fight for central Saipan came to an end. Since replacement drafts had not yet arrived, support units had been organized to serve as the division reserve. A total of five such companies were available to General Watson on the evening of 30 June.

Success at last crowned the efforts of the 27th Infantry Division, for on 29 and 30 June the soldiers burst through Death Valley and drew alongside the 8th Marines. The 106th Infantry joined the 105th in overrunning the valley, a company from 1/106 wiped out the stragglers trapped in Hell's Pocket, and 2/165 eliminated the die-hards entrenched on Purple Heart Ridge. Looking back upon the one-week battle, General Schmidt, who later succeeded

General Holland Smith as corps commander, observed that: "No one had any tougher job to do."⁵⁰ In clearing Death Valley and Purple Heart Ridge, the Army unit sustained most of the 1,836 casualties inflicted upon it since its landing.

Although no further advance was attempted, the 4th Marine Division continued to send patrols beyond its positions. Marine units made only occasional contacts with small groups of Japanese. The 165th Infantry, which yielded some of its frontage to the 23d Marines, exchanged long-range fire with the enemy.

On the 29th, the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 24th Marines protected the division left flank, while 2/24 mopped up Japanese infiltrators. Lieutenant Colonel Vandegrift, who had been wounded two days earlier, was evacuated. Command of 3/24 then passed to Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lessing, formerly the executive officer of the 20th Marines.

By dusk on 30 June, the 27th Infantry Division had advanced far enough to relieve 1/24 of responsibility for the southern segment of the left flank. The 4th Marine Division, however, continued to man an L-shaped line, though it encompassed less territory. The 25th Marines remained at Hill 500 in corps reserve. To date the division had suffered 4,454 casualties.

Central Saipan was now under American domination. The front stretched from Garapan past the Four Pimples to the 4th Marine Division left boundary.

⁵⁰ Gen Harry Schmidt ltr to MajGen Albert C. Smith, USA, dtd 10Jan55, quoted in Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*, p. 230.

Here the lines veered sharply northward to Hill 700, and then extended along a generally straight line from that hill to the eastern coast. Behind the lines, the hectic pace of the first few days had slowed. Of all the supplies carried for the assault troops, all but 1,662 tons had been unloaded by 28 June. (See Map 18.)

In spite of the long routes of evacuation and the difficult terrain, casualties were being moved speedily to the hospitals established on the island. Evacuating the wounded from the combat zone was a more difficult problem after the departure on 23 June of the last of the hospital ships. Transports and cargo vessels, some of them poorly

suited to the task, were pressed into service. Since the corps casualty rate declined toward the end of June, these ships, supplemented by planes flying from Aslito field, proved adequate.⁵¹

By the evening of 30 June, the Japanese had begun withdrawing to their final defensive line. During the next phase of the Saipan operation, General Holland Smith planned to thrust all the way to Tanapag. Near Flores Point, the 2d Marine Division would be pinched out, leaving the 27th Infantry Division and 4th Marine Division face to face with Saito's recently prepared defenses. (See Map 19.)

⁵¹ CominCh, *The Marianas*, pp. 5:19-5:20.

Northern Saipan: End of the Campaign¹

THE PICTURE ON 1 JULY

The scene of Saito's last stand had been sketched out on 27 June by *Thirty-first Army* Headquarters; "The defense force . . . is at present setting up with a line between Tanapag—Hill 221—Tarahoho as the final line of resistance."² Withdrawal to the line was ordered by Saito on 2 July.

In contrast, on the same date, the 2d Marine Division moved forward more rapidly than ever since the landings. Holland Smith's objective line, fixed on 1 July, ran from Garapan up the west

coast to Tanapag, then eastward across northern Saipan. Three American divisions—the 2d Marine Division on the left, the 4th Marine Division on the right, and the 27th Infantry Division between—were intent upon concluding the battle. Before executing the last moves, they turned to a straightening of the corps line.

On 1 July the 2d Division did not attempt to advance its left flank regiment, the 2d Marines, from favorable high ground outside Garapan, but awaited the advance of the 6th and 8th Marines on the right. The 27th Division, held up for five hours by opposition from several previously unknown enemy strongpoints, advanced 400 to 500 yards. The 4th Division held fast and supported the Army units by fire. Marine patrols found no Japanese up to 1,800 yards forward of the 4th Division line.

To the west, however, the 2d Division, like the 27th, encountered the enemy. In the division center, Marines of 3/6, moving toward the coast above Garapan, reached a wooded ravine defended by three Japanese field pieces, supported by rifles and machine guns. After briefly probing the strong point, Colonel Riseley bypassed it. He left Company B to destroy the resistance, a mission accomplished the next day.

On the division right, the 8th Marines picked up speed across relatively

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: *TF 51 OpRpt*; *TG 52.2 OpRpt*; *TF 56 OpRpt*; *NTLF OpRpt*; *2d MarDiv OpRpt*; *4th MarDiv OpRpt*; *27th InfDiv OpRpt*; *2d Mar SAR*; *6th Mar SAR*; *8th Mar SAR*; *10th Mar SAR*; *23d Mar Rpt*; *24th Mar Rpt*; *25th Mar Rpt*; *105th Inf Op Rpt*; *106th Inf OpRpt*; *165th Inf OpRpt*; Saburo Hayashi and Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Quantico: The Marine Corps Association, 1959), hereafter Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*; Capt James R. Stockman and Capt Philips D. Carleton, *Campaign for the Marianas* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1946), hereafter Stockman and Carleton, *Campaign for the Marianas*; Crowl, *Marianas Campaign*; Hoffman, *Saipan*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Johnston, *Follow Me!*; Love, *27th Inf Div History*; Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas*; Proehl, *4th MarDiv History*; Sherrod, *Marine Air History*; Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*.

² *Thirty-first Ar Outgoing Msg* No. 1120.

even terrain, where, better than around Tapotchau, the tanks could serve the infantry. At 0730 on 1 July, the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, in a well executed tank-infantry thrust, overran Tommy's Pimple with no casualties. The battalion then advanced, in conjunction with 2/8, toward the Tanapag Harbor area.

To the regimental left, on 1 July, the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, was joined by 2/2, relieving 3/8, and the two battalions reported good progress. The day's action included seizure of the last two Pimples, Larry's and Stan's.

By sunset of 1 July, then, the corps line had been straightened considerably. There was no longer any reason to delay the thrust toward Tanapag. The corps commander issued the appropriate order.

VICTORY AWAITS NORTHWARD

At 2245 on 1 July, the 2d Marines received attack orders from division ordering an advance into Garapan. The next morning at 1030, Colonel Stuart began to move out, the 1st Battalion on the right, the 3d on the left.

By 1200 the 3d Battalion, supported by Company C, 2d Tank Battalion, was 800 yards inside the town, finding grim evidence of what artillery, aircraft, and naval guns could do. Yet Japanese soldiers were still there—not many, but some—and hostile fire was encountered. Some American war correspondents reported that at Garapan the Marines experienced their first street fighting of World War II. According to division accounts, however, “actually there was little, if any, of this type of fighting compared to European standards. . . .

The town had been leveled completely.”³ Garapan had been the second largest town of the Marianas, next only to Agana in Guam. Before the first World War it had been headquarters of the German administration, and a village centuries before that.

Twisted metal roof tops now littered the area, shielding Japanese snipers. A number of deftly-hidden pillboxes were scattered among the ruins. Assault engineers, covered by riflemen, slipped behind such obstacles to set explosives while flamethrowers seared the front. Assisted by the engineers, and supported by tanks and 75mm self-propelled guns of the Regimental Weapons Company, the 2d Marines beat down the scattered resistance before nightfall. On the beaches, suppressing fire from the LVT(A)s of the 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion silenced Japanese weapons located near the water.

Advancing to the coast above the town, 1/2 sliced through scattered enemy defenses. Southeast of Garapan, riflemen of Company A seized Flame-tree Hill, where, despite the blasting by Marine artillery on 29 June, the enemy had continued to hold out.

While the 2d Marines was moving into Garapan, the 6th Marines attacked the high ground overlooking the town and overcame moderate resistance. Company A of 1/6 joined men from Companies A and B of 1/2 in silencing the fire from caves on rockbound Sugar Loaf, a distinctive hill on the regimental boundary.

Inland, the 8th Marines continued toward Tanapag Harbor. Progress of 2/8 and 1/29, however, was stopped on

³ 2d MarDiv OpRpt, SplCmts, p. 3.

the afternoon of 2 July, when machine guns opened up from a coral-limestone hill to the right of the flat terrain. Fire enfiladed the entire front of 2/8 and much of that of 1/29. Lieutenant Colonel Tompkins, commanding 1/29, was wounded by a shell fragment, and was immediately replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Jack P. Juhan, the 8th Marines executive officer.

The strongpoint lay too close to Marine lines for artillery fire. Major Chamberlin, commanding 2/8, attempted an envelopment, swinging Company F to the east along the only available route. The Marines cut through entangling underbrush hoping for surprise, but the enemy anticipated the move and turned the attackers back with a withering fusillade.

In the early evening, tanks and flame-throwers were employed against the hill. They did some damage, but emplacements were so well dug-in, and the caves so well fortified and arranged, that nothing but slow yard-by-yard demolition would neutralize the position. It was decided, therefore, to bypass the strongpoint and resume the advance the next morning, leaving Company F to contain it. On the evening of 3 July, the 2d Provisional Company, one of the units formed from the shore parties, came up to relieve Company F of its task, and the latter rejoined its battalion, then 1,000 yards ahead.

Opposition to the progress of the 4th Division was markedly less than that met by the 2d Division. On 2 July, ending its brief pause, and with the 23d and 24th Marines in assault, the 4th Division advanced toward the northwest coast. A gain of some 1,600

yards was reported for the day against such light resistance that only one Marine was wounded. At 1345, the division dug in until units of 3/165 on the left could catch up.

The 27th Infantry Division, rejoined the day before by the 165th Regiment, spent 2 July mopping up rough terrain in its zone of advance. Five enemy tanks emplaced as pillboxes were encountered and knocked out by the 106th Infantry. Heavy machine gun fire delayed 3/105, creating a risky gap between 3/165 on its right and the 106th Infantry on its left. General Griner ordered 1/105 to wheel around the 3d Battalion combat area and march north to close the gap, a mission it accomplished before dark. The division reported gains for 1,400 to 1,800 yards on 2 July and made contact on the right with the 4th Marine Division. (See Map 19.)

A NEW LOOK AT THE MAP

Satisfied with the overall situation, Holland Smith felt it was time to execute certain changes. Desiring to rest the 2d Marine Division for the Tinian campaign, he altered direction of the corps attack late on 2 July, bending it left, more to the northwest. Under this plan, the 2d Division would be pinched out above Garapan, while the 27th Infantry Division inclined west toward the sea near Tanapag, forming a barrier against Japanese retreat northward. The 4th Marine Division, after reaching the west coast above Tanapag, would veer east, to compress the enemy in the remaining northern area. On 3 July, the 25th Marines was released from corps reserve, enabling

General Schmidt to attack on a three-regiment front.

Marines of the 2d Division spent a busy Fourth of July, prior to leaving the lines. The 3d Battalion of the 2d Marines took Mutcho Point by 0900, eliminating a small Japanese garrison. The only headache of the operation was an enemy heavy antiaircraft gun farther up the shore, which delivered air bursts uncomfortably close to the attacking troops.

By 1000 on the same day, the 6th Marines was on the beach at Tanapag Harbor, and at 1320, the 8th Marines reached the same vicinity. During the afternoon, Marines of 1/2 employing LVTs cleaned out the few enemy trapped in the boat basin. About the harbor the hulks of damaged ships sheltered some Japanese snipers. Up and down the coast there were still a number of undestroyed concrete pill-boxes.

With the action of 4 July, most of the 2d Marine Division passed into NTLF reserve. The 4th Marine Division and the 27th Infantry Division were assigned to conclude the campaign. During the afternoon of 4 July, the Army division shifted its frontline units and prepared for the drive toward Marpi Point. The 105th Regiment was shortly to be joined by its 2d Battalion, which started marching north on the 4th after its release from duty at Nafutan Point. Soldiers of the 106th took over the shell-wrecked seaplane base at Flores Point on 4 July.

The NTLF commander addressed an Independence Day "well done" to all troops. The day was appropriately noted in 4th Division reports by the capture of "Fourth of July Hill," a

heavily wooded knob on the eastern side of Hill 721. The higher hill was, in fact, the more significant rise, since the Japanese there observed much surrounding terrain. Efforts by 3/23 to capture Hill 721 on 3 July had been violently opposed. The infantrymen, deprived of tank support by mines, were stopped short. Colonel Jones, commanding the 23d Marines, therefore ordered the battalion pulled back some 300 yards, to permit night bombardment by howitzers of the 14th Marines. Next morning, 1/23 passed through 3/23 and swept to the top of Hill 721 against surprisingly light small arms and machine gun fire. Most of the battered enemy had departed for a more healthful area. (See Map 19.)

A neighboring hill, 767, was taken by a strong combat patrol from 1/23 without meeting enemy fire. This hill marked the deepest thrust of the American advance on 4 July. Around it, the 25th Marines tied in with the 23d, while the 24th Marines—with Hill 221⁴ pocketed the day before—drew up on the left. Marines were by now practically neighbors of General Saito, for Hill 767 was next door to Paradise Valley (labeled "Valley of Hell" by the Japanese), site of the last Japanese headquarters on Saipan. (See Map 20.)

WRAPPING UP THE CAMPAIGN

General Smith fixed noon of 5 July as jump-off hour for the final push on

⁴The hill was nicknamed Radar Hill by the Marines because of Japanese radar installations there.

northern Saipan, involving the 4th Marine Division on the right and the 27th Infantry Division on the left. Army troops were by then on the Tanapag plain. Prior to the attack, the 106th Infantry went into reserve. The last advance was assigned to the other regiments, the 105th on the left and the 165th on the right. These soldiers near the eastern shore were due for some of the toughest combat experienced on the island.

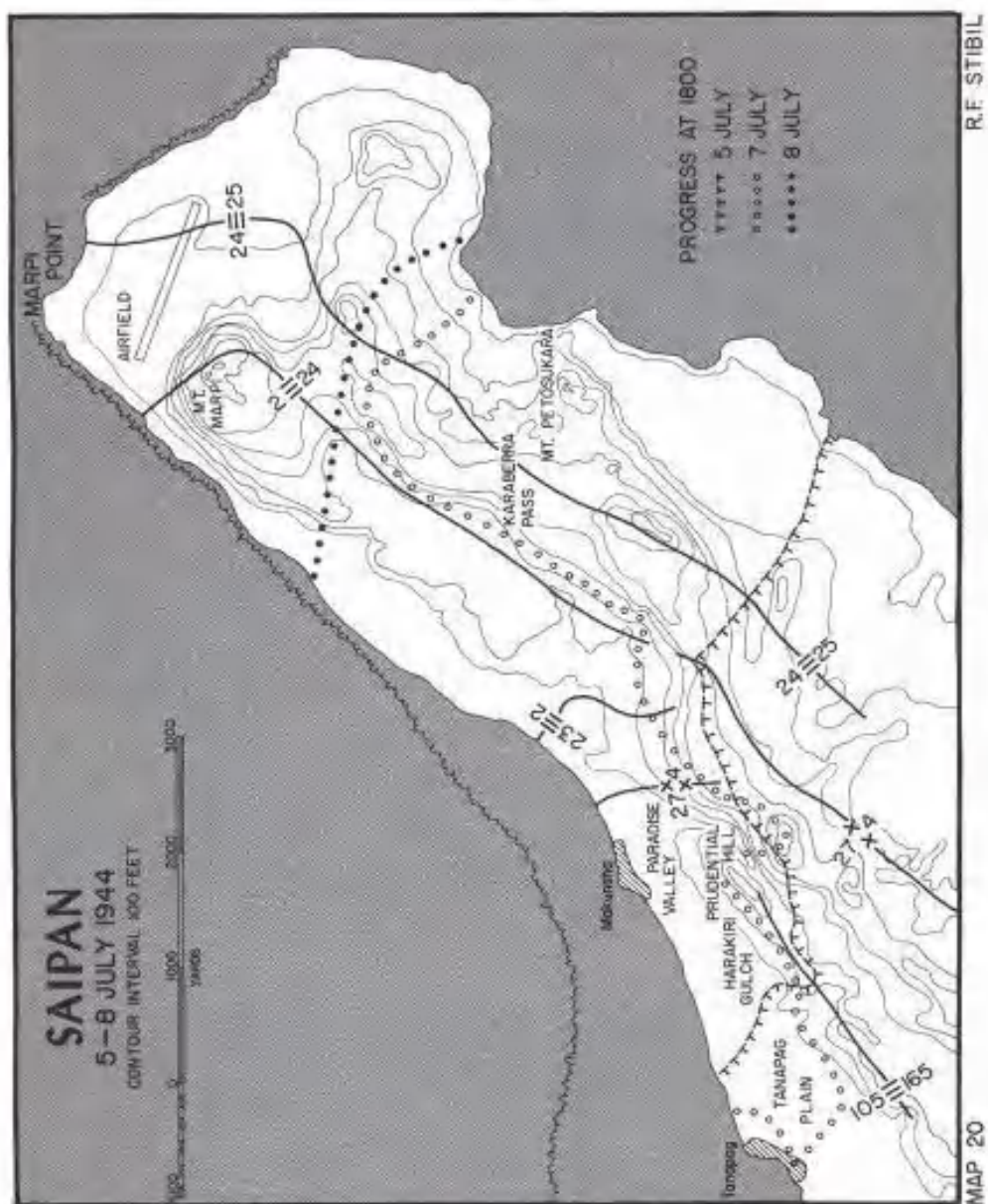
In the middle interior, the 4th Marine Division advanced so rapidly to Karaberra Pass on 5 July that the corps commander resolved upon a change of missions. He felt concerned that the 27th Infantry Division, which was moving against stiffer resistance, would get too far behind. At 0900 on 6 July, therefore, he ordered the 27th Division to alter its direction of advance from northeast to north, and he moved the left flank of the 4th Division to the northwest. (See Map 20.)

When Army troops reached the coast near the village of Makunsha the 27th Division would be pinched out. The 4th Division was then to pick up the advance to Marpi Point, northern tip of the island. The new zone of the 27th Division extended up the coast from Tanapag to just above Makunsha and partially inland. It included a canyon, shortly to be dubbed Harakiri Gulch, and Paradise Valley. Everything northeast of the Army sector was assigned to the 4th Division. On 6 July, the 2d Marines was attached to that division and charged with destroying any Japanese that slipped away from the Army vanguard. On the same day, 1/29 passed to control of General Jarman's Garrison Force.

On the afternoon of 6 July, the 25th Marines, advancing with 13 tanks, got as far northeast as Mt. Petosukara, which was taken after digging out Japanese from cliffs en route. The day's action included surrender of a group of more than 700 civilians shortly before dark. The 24th Marines, to the left, gained up to 1,800 yards without difficulty, but the 23d Marines, probing the fringes of Paradise Valley, was delayed by fire from caves and underbrush, much of it at their backs. Contact with the 24th Marines was lost, but connection was made with elements of the 27th Division. Next day, the 2d Marines was put into line between the 23d and 24th Marines.

With the 106th Infantry going into reserve on 4 July, the 105th pursued the advance up the west coast while the 165th moved through the adjoining interior. The 2d Battalion, 105th passed through the ruins of Tanapag unopposed on 5 July, but beyond there its advance was blocked by machine gun fire. Shortly after moving out on 6 July, the battalion was stopped by a hail of small arms fire coming from the immediate front. The source, at first undetectable, proved to be a shallow ditch just 150 yards ahead. It seemed a suitable target for 60mm mortars, but ammunition was lacking. A rifle squad rushed what appeared to be the most active machine gun position, but the squad leader was wounded and the bold effort repulsed. Three roving Army tanks then turned up and joined the fight, with the result that some 150 Japanese soldiers jammed along the ditch were killed. The action freed the advance of 2/105.

On 6 July, 3/105, operating farther



inland, approached the edge of Harakiri Gulch and was stopped by fire. This canyon, stretching 400 yards long, east to west, and 50 yards wide, lay astride the regimental boundary. On 5 July, a company of the 165th Infantry had collided with a nest of enemy defenders in the same area and had been driven back by a veritable wall of enemy fire. On the next day, when 1/165 attempted the canyon, its men were surprised by a series of explosions inside some straw shacks, caused when about 60 Japanese committed suicide with grenades. The event did not indicate capitulation, however. Resistance by other Japanese kept the gulch impenetrable to 1/165, as well as to 3/105 which attacked it on the west. A relieving battalion, 3/106, aided by a platoon of tanks, was at last able to secure the floor of the canyon by 0900 on 7 July.

The enemy's defense of Harakiri Gulch, grim though it was, becomes obscured by the size and fury of what befell the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 105th Infantry on 7 July. A desperate scheme had been evolved by the weary and ill Saito—then “a pitiful sight,” an enemy staff officer recalled.⁴ Oppressed by reports of ground lost—of Saipan, last hope of Imperial victory, slipping away—he meditated upon cheerless alternatives. Saito's sixth and last command post, taken up on 3 July, was the smallest. A cave sheltered by jungle, it cut low into a hill of Paradise Valley. More like a refuge than a headquarters, the cave lay some 1,000 yards inland from Makunsha. It was miles and days from the village

schoolhouse in Charan Kanoa, Saito's first command post of the Saipan campaign.

SAITO'S LAST DECISIONS

By now the valley of Saito's despair was raked daily by Marine artillery and naval gunfire. The general himself had been wounded by a shell fragment. After consulting staff officers and Vice Admiral Nagumo—likewise at a cave headquarters—the Japanese commander plotted a last grand *banzai* attack to start before the dawn of 7 July. It was one alternative to waiting for destruction; no tactical accomplishment was apparently expected. “Whether we attack or whether we stay where we are, there is only death” said the general's melancholy summary of affairs.⁵ Saito, the advocate of mobile defense, was at last immobilized. In repayment to the Empire for the loss of Saipan, he exhorted each Japanese soldier to exact seven lives for one.

Saito would lead the advance, he proclaimed, but actually he had other plans for himself. The order prepared, the general adjourned to a farewell meal of *sake* and canned crabmeat. Next morning, leaving the attack to hands less old and tired, Saito committed *harakiri*.⁶

The desperate assault was expected by General Smith, among others. On 6 July, the corps commander, accompanied by General Watson, visited the

⁵ From the text of Saito's last order, quoted in *NTLF OpRpt*, Encl D, Pt I, pp. 57–58.

⁶ Japanese prisoners said the command of the attack devolved upon Colonel Eisuke Suzuki of the 135th Infantry Regiment, who was reported killed.

⁴ *NTLF OpRpt*, Encl D, Pt II, App G, p. 2.

27th Division CP and cautioned General Griner to be on the alert for a Japanese counterattack. The Tanapag plain furnished the most likely avenue of approach if the enemy chose to attack. Holland Smith also indicated that when the Army division lines had advanced about a mile to the north, he intended to pass Watson's 2d Division through the 27th and continue the attack with the 2d and 4th Divisions on line.⁷

Just before sunrise, about 0400 on 7 July, like some ancient barbaric horde, the Japanese soldiers started down the Tanapag plain from around Makunsha. The attack route followed mainly along the coastal railroad. The men were led by officers, and they were equipped with machine guns, mortars, and tanks. Yet it was like military order gone awry, replaced by individual passion, a fearful charge of flesh and fire. Savage and primitive, the assault reverted to warfare of centuries before. Some of the enemy were armed only with rocks or a knife mounted on a pole. (See Map VI, Map Section.)

Whatever it was that drove the Japanese, or inspired them, they came on and on, straight into the muzzles of opposing guns. "They just kept coming and coming," recalled Major Edward McCarthy, commanding 2/105. "I didn't think they'd ever stop. It was like a cattle stampede."⁸ The exact number of the attackers will probably never be known, but it was believed to approximate 3,000, includ-

ing remnants of every unit on the island, even walking wounded.⁹

First to receive the impact of the bloody attack were the isolated positions of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 105th Infantry, which had dug in for the night 1,200 yards south of Makunsha. At 0530 Colonel Bishop, commanding the Army regiment, telephoned to division that terrific mortar fire was falling on the two battalions.

The soldiers fought for their lives as tremendous masses of the enemy flooded into a 300-yard gap between the battalions, discovered by enemy patrols the night before. Both American battalions had pressed their attack until 1630 on 6 July, too late to consolidate their lines before nightfall.¹⁰

By 0635, after a night of fierce combat, the Japanese had overrun the 1st and 2d Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel William J. O'Brien, commanding 1/105, symbolized the high courage of the resistance. After emptying pistols held in each hand, and though seriously wounded, he turned a machine gun against the enemy until, like so many other officers and men, he was cut down in the hopeless struggle. Shortly

⁹ From its positions on the heights inland, the 23d Marines could see "considerable numbers of Japanese moving southward down the plain. These were taken under fire by machine guns and mortars. *Jones ltr.*

¹⁰ Colonel Bishop indicated that the day's plan of attack called for units advancing on the right of the 105th to seize objectives which would have pinched out or at least narrowed the zone of his regiment. When this attack failed to reach its objective, he wrote, "We found ourselves off balance and with a gap between our 1st and 2nd Bns." Col Leonard A. Bishop ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 28Feb63.

⁷ MajGen George W. Griner, Jr., USA, ltr to ACoS, G-3, dtd 12Jan63.

⁸ Quoted in Love, *27th InfDiv History*, p. 443.

before he was killed, he had radioed the 105th Infantry command post: "There are only 100 men left from the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 105th. For God's sake get us some ammunition and water and medical supplies right away."¹¹ But four jeeploads of ammunition could not get through.

An offshoot wave of the enemy attack broke against the positions of 3/105 at Harakiri Gulch, but here the Americans, holding high ground, beat off the Japanese. The 1st and 2d Battalions, what was left of them, were pushed back across the plain to Tanapag, where house-to-house fighting ensued.

About 500 yards southwest of Tanapag on that fateful morning was the 3d Battalion, 10th Marines. Nearby was 4/10. The two battalions, now attached to the 4th Division, had moved into position the day before, to provide supporting fires for the 23d Marines. About 0515, just at daybreak, enemy were identified at 400 yards, moving upon the most forward battery, H, of 3/10. It then seemed hardly minutes before nearly 500 Japanese, employing machine guns, rifles, grenades, and tanks assaulted the entire battalion position.

Only Battery H, on the left of the railroad tracks, was able to fire its 105mm howitzers. The guns of other batteries were silent, forced to hold their fire by the fact that Americans were positioned to their front. Artillerymen of Battery H cut their fuses to four-tenths of a second; shells exploded less than 50 yards forward of the

muzzles. At such a range the artillerymen swung one howitzer around to destroy a Japanese medium tank approaching from the rear.

A number of the Marine cannoneers were shot in position, crippling the firing effectiveness of the battery. Finally, an enemy breakthrough at 0700 in a wooded ravine to the left forced the survivors of Battery H to withdraw about 50 yards across a road. There the unit set up a defense in an abandoned Japanese machinery dump, where the Marines held out with carbines, an automatic rifle, a pistol, and eight captured Japanese rifles until relieved around 1500 by Army troops.

Personnel of Headquarters and Service Battery, set up behind Battery H, were run over at the crest of the drive. The battalion commander, Major William L. Crouch, was killed in the vain defense. Battery I repelled a light brush with the enemy at 0455 before the full weight of the assault was felt. Thereafter, however, the supply of artillery and small arms ammunition dwindled rapidly, and, after removing the firing locks from their howitzers, the artillerymen fell back to the positions of Battery G. There the two batteries stood ground, joined at mid-afternoon by elements of the 106th Infantry.

Southeast of 3/10, Marines of the 4th Battalion defended their own firing positions, killing 85 Japanese who were on the fringe of the tide. Several men of the battalion also helped bring some small arms ammunition to 3/10 and evacuate wounded from that area. A group of 12 men and 1 officer of the battalion joined counterattacking Army troops. Of the 4th Battalion casual-

¹¹ Quoted in Love, *27th InfDiv History*, p. 447.

ties on 7 July—three enlisted men killed and seven wounded—most were the Marines who were helping out forward.

Following the assault of the Marine battery positions, the Japanese swept on, approaching the regimental command post of the 105th, about 800 yards south of Tanapag. Here, however, they could not get through the defenses. The enemy spearhead was beginning to show the blunting accomplished by the desperate fighting of the units that had been overrun. At 1130, the depleted and tiring enemy was considered pretty well stopped, but fighting dragged on through the afternoon. By then, however, the impetus had entirely vanished from the attack, and some of the Japanese were turning grenades upon themselves.

The end, at last, was due both to Army and Marine efforts. After sending every available tank to support the beleaguered battalions of the 105th, General Griner had issued orders at 0700 to the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 106th, the division reserve, moving them into position at Flores Point to attack north along the railroad. The 2d Battalion was already at a Flores Point assembly area. In support of the attack by the 106th, a provisional company of tanks was attached. The two Army battalions were to relieve the 105th and help regain the Marine battery positions. They would be supported by the three 105mm howitzer battalions of 27th Division artillery.

The counterattack got under way at 1000, the movement of units hampered by communication difficulties. The 2d Battalion of the 106th had been particularly directed to reinforce the Ma-

rines, and its Company F helped retake the Battery I position by 1135.

Entire reoccupation of the Marine positions was accomplished during the afternoon, and a line was then formed from the beach to the left of the 4th Division. Upon request by the 27th Division, a Marine battalion, 3/6, was attached and it helped solidify the new line. By 1800, most of the ground lost by the *banzai* attack was again in friendly hands.

Saito's farewell order had cost the two 105th Infantry battalions 406 killed and 512 wounded. The 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, lost 45 killed and 82 wounded, and in turn killed more than 300 Japanese. Survivors would never forget "the raid," as they termed it.

A staggering total of Japanese were killed. In the area of the *banzai* attack, 4,311 Japanese corpses were found. Some of these dead were undoubtedly the victims of artillery or naval gunfire prior to the attack, but the vast majority were killed in the climatic, fanatical charge of the Saipan garrison.

POSTSCRIPT TO "THE RAID"

The casualty-ridden 27th Division (less the 165th Infantry) was relieved by Holland Smith at 0630 of 8 July, and put into corps reserve. To accomplish the mop up of the devastated west coast, the corps commander re-committed the 2d Marine Division, attaching to it the 165th. He also brought 3/6, 3/10, and 4/10 back to the 2d Division.

Some resistance was met by the 6th Marines on 8 July, from about 100

Japanese well entrenched east of Tanapag. After a brief exchange, Company F was left behind to eliminate the pocket. Otherwise, the Marines found the enemy along the coast to be poorly armed and disorganized. Inland hills, however, still contained hidden defenses where few could kill many, and Japanese holdouts here slowed the progress of the 8th Marines.

The 1st Battalion of the 165th, after a costly action at Harakiri Gulch, moved through the canyon area and reached the west coast on 9 July. Paradise Valley was bypassed by 2/165, which left the 3d Battalion to destroy the Japanese still there. The 2d Battalion went on to Makunsha, by then a center of enemy stragglers.

In those last days, the spirit of the *banzai* attack flamed again occasionally. Japanese would charge from a hiding place, reckless of the consequences. Some, of course, were simply trying to escape. At the beaches a number of Japanese swam hopelessly out to coral outcroppings, where they either were killed or destroyed themselves.

The 4th Marine Division, which on 6 July took over the entire front beyond Makunsha, found the advance toward Marpi Point eased somewhat as a result of the *banzai* attack—there were fewer Japanese. The 2d Marines, attached on 8 July, went into line between the 23d Marines to the left and the 24th and 25th to the right. Thus, with four Marine regiments abreast on a 6,300-yard front, the division attacked toward the northwest on 8 July. (See Map 20.)

The 2d and 24th Marines secured their beach area at 1530. The advance of the 23d Marines was marked by

destruction of stubborn resistance on a cliff overlooking Karaberra Pass. As Marines struggled against the enemy there on 7 July, they nicknamed the high ground "Prudential Hill" because it resembled an American insurance company trademark. But, unlike the peaceful scene of Gibraltar, there were mines hidden at the base of the hill. The area was masked for fire by 4th Division artillery, and in order to provide support, truck-mounted rocket launchers were lowered over the cliff with their rate of descent controlled by tanks chained to the trucks. Once they reached the base of the cliff, the launchers fired into its face to beat down Japanese resistance.¹² Offshore, rocket gunboats joined in the deluge of fire turned on the caves that held the enemy holdouts.

Reduction of "Prudential Hill" insured that Marines moving across the coastal plain would not be fired upon from the rear. By 1410 of 8 July, the 23d Marines reached the shore above Makunsha. The next morning the regiment was assembled in division reserve and assigned to mopping up along the coast. A detachment of the 2d Armored Amphibian Battalion helped demolish lingering cave resistance.

With the total good progress on 8 July, General Schmidt prepared to unleash a thrust to Marpi Point. At 1330 on that day, he directed the 25th Marines to seize commanding ground 700 yards forward of positions then held, in order to gain observation of the Marpi Point area. The move was made against practically no resistance.

¹² Jones ltr.



TRUCK-MOUNTED ROCKET LAUNCHERS fire at Japanese strongpoints in northern Saipan. (USMC 104069)



FLAME TANK spews a stream of liquid fire toward an enemy cave during the mop-up action on Saipan. (USMC 85829)

THE ISLAND SECURED

The next morning, the 25th, the 24th, and the 2d Marines, from right to left, attacked with the mission of securing the last objective line on the island. Some scattered counterattacks were beaten off by the 2d Marines at Mt. Marpi, but much of the hill was bypassed. The airfield beyond was found utterly wrecked by bombardment.

By 1615 all three Marine regiments were at the coast, having advanced a total of 2,500 yards that day. The fire-scarred earth of Saipan lay behind. Vice Admiral Turner declared the island secured, putting the time at 1615 of 9 July. The next day an official flag-raising took place at Holland Smith's headquarters in Charan Kanoa.

For the Marines at Marpi Point, a tragic sight took the edge off a happy occasion. Hundreds of Japanese civilians, fearful of the Americans, committed suicide by jumping from the seaside cliffs. Some took their children with them. Efforts to stop them fell upon ears deafened by Japanese propaganda. Fortunately, many civilians had previously surrendered amicably, entrusting their fate to Marine and Army civil affairs officers, and were grateful for the care and safety found in the internment camps.

Many of the more than 42,000 Japanese, Korean, and Formosan civilians on the island had been evacuated before the battle. Starting in March 1944, following seizure of the Marshalls, some 5,000 persons on Saipan, mostly Japanese women and children, were sent home. Of the Japanese still on the island, 9,091 were in camp by 15 July. Half of the number were children.

The interned Korean civilians, at the same date, came to 1,158, including children.

A 1937 census of the native islanders of Saipan showed 3,143 Chamorros and 1,037 Kanakas.¹³ When the United States and Japan fought over their home in 1944, the natives were mostly sympathetic to the Americans and glad to come under their protection. Nearly 3,000 of the islanders, mainly the Chamorros, were in an internment camp by the end of the battle.

The total number of POWs held on Saipan as of 9 July stood at 736, counting 438 Koreans. But the post-campaign mopping up raised the total to 1,734 by 27 July, including 838 Koreans.

After Saipan was secured, a miniature amphibious operation took place on 13 July. A small island in Tanapag Harbor—Maniagassa Island—was seized by the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, which landed from LVTs after a preparation by artillery and naval gunfire. In taking over the island, the Marines received hostile fire from only one pillbox, where a light machine gun was manned. Of the small enemy garrison, which numbered 31, 15 were taken prisoner, including 2 Army laborers and 10 Koreans who could not speak Japanese. The rest of the garrison was killed. One Marine was wounded.

The taking of Maniagassa ended Marine action on Saipan. Leaving the hunt for Japanese stragglers to the Army Garrison Force, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions prepared for their

¹³ Tadao Yanaihara, *Pacific Islands Under Japanese Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), Table I, p. 30.

next mission, due very soon—the capture of neighboring Tinian.

SAIPAN IN RETROSPECT

Letters from home were already telling Marines how the American press evaluated the campaign just over. “One of the bloodiest battles in U.S. military annals,” said *Time* magazine.¹⁴ The Marines knew well that Saipan was costly, but most of them understood something more. There were compensations, if there could be any to the bereaved, for the loss of more than 3,000 American lives. NTLF accounting on 5 August put American casualties at 3,225 killed, 13,061 wounded, and 326 missing;¹⁵ known enemy dead were recorded as 23,811.

Holland Smith felt that Saipan was “the decisive battle of the Pacific offensive.” Capture of the island, he said, “breached Japan’s inner defense line, destroyed the main bastions, and opened the way to the home islands.”¹⁶ During the battle, Saito wrote that “the fate of the Empire will be decided in this one action.”¹⁷ It would have comforted many American homes to hear in 1944 what Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Miwa said after the final Japanese

surrender: “Our war was lost with the loss of Saipan.”¹⁸

The B-29s could now bomb the Japanese homeland from Saipan. Indeed, the Army Air Forces lost no time building on the island it had coveted. The first B-29 airdrome there was begun on 24 June 1944, and on 24 November, a hundred B-29s departed Saipan for a strike at Tokyo, the first since Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle’s daring raid in 1942.

The advance of United States naval power, permitted by the capture of Saipan, also worried the Japanese. As early as 26 June 1944, Emperor Hirohito expressed to Foreign Minister Shigemitsu a desire for diplomatic settlement of the war, and the actual fall of Saipan caused the resignation of Premier Tojo and his entire cabinet on 18 July. Yet, except for the Emperor, there was still no one in Japanese officialdom, including the new Premier Koiso, who dared to suggest peace. The military, as they continued the hopeless struggle, drew some tactical lessons from Saipan. The chief lesson was to organize defenses in depth, a change which would be noticed on Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

For American planners there were various lessons derived from the campaign. One of the most vital concerned the proper employment of supporting aviation. Complaints had arisen on Saipan that Navy and Army planes did not arrive in time, because of faulty control procedures. Re-

¹⁴ *Time*, v. 44, no. 2 (10Jul44), p. 33.

¹⁵ A final medical summary, dated 9 September 1944, in *TF 56 OpRpt*, listed American casualties as 3,100 killed, 13,099 wounded, and 326 missing. Hoffman, *Saipan*, pp. 268–269, contains a unit breakdown of Army and Marine casualties in Saipan. Final official Marine casualty totals are contained in Appendix H.

¹⁶ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 181.

¹⁷ NTLF G-2, Tgs Sent and Received by Thirty-First ArHq on Saipan, dtd 25Jul44, p. 16.

¹⁸ *USSBS Interrogation* Nav No. 72, VAdm Shigeyoshi Miwa, IJN, II, p. 298. Miwa was successively Director, Naval Submarine Department, and Chief, Sixth (Submarine) Fleet.

requested missions were often cancelled because infantry had advanced past the target before the planes appeared. One result of the criticism was that close air support techniques, many of them pioneered and developed by Marines, received better attention after Saipan. On Luzon, where Army ground troops were supported by both Marine and Army Air Forces squadrons, close air support would really come into its own.

In the Saipan campaign, Marine aviation was represented by two observation squadrons, VMO-2 and VMO-4, which performed artillery spotting for the Marine divisions. On 17 June, for the first time, the OYs—the mono-planes called “grasshoppers”—took off from carriers. Landing at Yellow Beach or Charan Kanoa, they moved to Aslito airfield after its capture on 18 June. The little observation planes served valuably, not only in artillery spotting missions but also in gathering intelligence. Another Marine aviation unit, Air Warning Squadron 5, also operated with ground troops at Saipan, one detachment serving with corps troops, and two others with the Marine divisions. Not a single enemy aircraft slipped by the alert radar units of the squadron.

Naval gunfire seemed to impress the Japanese most at Saipan. The fire came from assorted vessels—LCI gunboats to battleships—and from guns 20mm to 16 inches in caliber. The gunfire ships supported troops on call, laid down preparatory fire, and illuminated the battlefield with star shells.

More than 8,500 tons of ammunition were expended on troop support missions. The ships could maneuver bet-

ter than land-based artillery, but the flat trajectory of naval guns proved somewhat limiting, particularly against a reverse slope target. In addition to requested naval gunfire, certain destroyers, which were designated “sniper ships,” cruised near the coast, picking out targets of opportunity.

Saito was so vexed by the incessant shelling from the sea that he wrote: “If there just were no naval gunfire, we feel we could fight it out with the enemy in a decisive battle.”¹⁹ The statement seemed to support Navy claims for their guns and marksmanship. It is probable that the Japanese switch to defense in depth, after Saipan, was due partly to fear of naval gunfire. Certainly it was a lesson of the campaign that naval gunfire could be enormously effective. Every previous operation had shown the necessity for more of it.

Saito's lament regarding naval gunfire could well also have been: “If there just were no artillery. . . .” As Holland Smith recalled, “never before in the Pacific had Marines gone into action with so much armament, ranging from 75's to 155's.”²⁰ Marine and Army artillery shook the island.

General Smith felt, however, that the available wealth of artillery was not sufficiently appreciated by infantry commanders, at least at the beginning of the campaign. On 1 July, he specifically ordered that “massed artillery fires will be employed to support infantry attacks whenever practicable. Infantry will closely follow artillery

¹⁹ CinCPac-CinCPOA Item No. 9983-85, Disps Sent and Received by Thirty-first ArHq.

²⁰ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 191.

concentrations and attack ruthlessly when the artillery lifts.”²¹

In every war the foot soldier has been skeptical of the cannoneer's marksmanship. There were instances on Saipan of friendly artillery fire hitting the lines and causing casualties. But such incidents did not detract from the praise accorded both Marine and Army artillery on Saipan. The destruction of Japanese water points was, in itself, quite decisive. The enemy's shortage of water—and food also—became truly desperate. Rain, cursed for the mud it caused, was blessed for the thirst it quenched.

The directing of artillery fire by forward observers and air spotters was sometimes hampered on Saipan by the rapidity of infantry movement. Under the hard-driving Holland Smith “the Japanese never got a minute's peace,” as he said himself.²² “The Saipan campaign followed a definite pattern of continuous attack,” said a 4th Division summary.²³

Some regimental commanders objected, however, that corps insistence on unrelenting pressure upon the enemy, often to a late hour, was not always a good thing. Extreme pushing of the attack could bring a unit to untenable ground. The policy of jumping off right after dawn sometimes prevented sufficient reconnaissance of caves and density of underbrush, features which seldom showed on a map. Inadequate reconnaissance could also result in a waste

of fire on areas containing few, if any, of the enemy.

It was felt by some Marine officers that the factors of time and space were not always sufficiently considered by NTLF headquarters. “Progress through heavy canefields, through dense underbrush, and over extremely rough terrain, such as was encountered, cannot be made at ‘book’ speed,” said one regimental commander.²⁴ Yet the incessant urgency which marked command policy on Saipan quite likely shortened the campaign and saved lives. “I was determined to take Saipan and take it quickly,” said Holland Smith afterwards.²⁵

Logistics progress kept up, breathlessly, with General Smith's impelling campaign. Unusual conditions encountered during the battle accounted partly for some faulty supply estimates. The 81mm and 60mm mortars, which were sparingly used on the small land areas of the atolls, were much in demand on Saipan for close infantry support. The unit of fire tables which sufficed for previous Central Pacific battles did not here provide for enough mortar ammunition. Extreme shortages resulted. In particular, the early commitment of the 27th Division taxed initial supplies of ammunition.

It was, in fact, the early debarkation of the Army division that led to a classic example of wholesale beach congestion. The imminence of a naval battle, added to the hard combat ashore, hastened the landing of the corps reserve, but evidently no plans had been formulated for landing in that partic-

²¹ NTLF OpO 19-44, dtd 1Jul44.

²² Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 167.

²³ 4th MarDiv OpRpt.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Smith and Finch, *Coral and Brass*, p. 185.



OBSERVATION PLANE *flies over northern Saipan near Marpi Point, scene of the final battles on the island.* (USN 80-G-238386)



SUPPORTING CRUISER *fires at targets on Tinian as LVTs carrying assault troops head toward the White Beaches.* (USMC 88102)

ular area, directly behind the 4th Marine Division. Beach parties were consequently overwhelmed by supplies piling up and getting mixed up. There was not enough time to sort and separate, and some Marine equipment got into Army dumps. Soldiers received utility clothes marked USMC, and much of the 27th Division artillery ammunition turned up in Marine dumps.²⁶

A certain opportunism marked the unloading, which did not help the beach parties any. There was a tendency, once a beach was in friendly hands, to shove all supplies over that beach, rather than risk the artillery and mortar fire which harassed unloading elsewhere. The plan relative to general unloading did permit supplies to be put off on any beach, but organic equipment was to be landed only on properly assigned beaches. "In practice, however, this was not done," said a 4th Division report,²⁷ and misappropriation resulted. After the Saipan experience, Admiral Hill felt that matters would improve if a permanent corps shore party was organized. It would be solely responsible for the movement of supplies from the beach to the dumps and for issue therefrom to the divisions.

On top of the other headaches was a special circumstance which delayed un-

loading. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was in the making, and the danger of air or surface attack by the approaching Japanese fleet required caution. Admiral Turner ordered all transports and landing ships except Admiral Hill's flagship, the *Cambria*, to retire for the night of D-Day, 15-16 June, and not to return until daylight. The next two nights there were only a few ships with high priority cargo permitted to stay and continue unloading. Then, until the naval battle was over, most of the transports stayed at sea both day and night, interrupting the flow of supplies.

Once the ships were unloaded, the battle of corps dimensions absorbed equipment at unprecedented rates. Estimates of resupply requirements proved much too low. Each signal unit loaded 20 days of equipment, but the campaign showed that on an objective like Saipan the supply would not last for 20 days' of combat. A shortage of radio batteries was not overcome. Such errors were not forgotten, however, and for the battles yet to be fought the logistic lessons of Saipan were useful.

The campaign also imposed tactical demands new to the Pacific war. It was a battle of movement on a sizable land mass, but movement was complicated by the Japanese system of caves. The enemy had defended caves before—on Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo—but never so extensively. On Saipan the caves were both natural and man-made, and often artfully hidden by vegetation. To cope with them, the Marines perfected various methods of approach. Where terrain permitted, a

²⁶ Admiral Hill recalled that when the complaints began to come in from the two divisions, he talked to the NTLF chief of staff, General Erskine, who sent out orders that there would be common dumps for all except organic equipment and supplies. The admiral pointed out that as soon as the supplies of the Army division "began to flow, there was no real problem." *Hill comments Saipan*.

²⁷ *4th MarDiv OpRpt*.

flame-throwing tank²⁸ would advance under cover of fire from medium tanks or half tracks. In terrain where armor could not be moved up, the infantrymen would cover for the engineers who placed demolition charges. Sometimes a cave proved so inaccessible that engineers had to lob satchel charges from cliffs above it.

In other approaches, Marines fired automatic weapons or hurled grenades directly into the cave entrance. It was always dismaying to find that a cave which had been seared or blasted could bristle with live Japanese the next day. The enemy's clever use of caves was prophetic of Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa and showed detailed planning. A number were well-stocked with supplies. Some had steel doors which were opened periodically to loose bursts of machine-gun fire.

Where a cave defense was not available, the enemy built emplacements of concrete or coconut logs, covered with earth and vegetation. A coconut grove often contained some Japanese strong-point. Reserve slope defenses were popular, and the wooded valleys favored the enemy's talent for digging in. The canefields were a favorite hiding place for Japanese snipers, until the growth was flattened by a bulldozer. But sniping from trees, a common practice on other Pacific islands, sel-

dom occurred on Saipan. Marines believed that perhaps the enemy feared artillery air bursts in the wooded areas.

From the beginning of the Saipan campaign the Japanese did not organize a true main line of resistance. Instead, they defended strong points which were not connected. For the most part, they made piecemeal counterattacks, attempted by relatively small groups of platoon or company size.

Infiltration was a beloved tactic. Nearly every night a handful of Japanese ventured out, bearing demolitions, grenades, and mines. But such enemy behavior was familiar to the Marines, who reported, in fact, that "no new tactics were observed" on Saipan.²⁹

Night or day, except at rash moments, the Japanese cautiously respected their opponents. Prisoners expressed wonder at the accurate and tremendous firepower of Marine units. That included not only what was delivered by artillery but also by other weapons, not the least of which was the infantryman's rifle. On Saipan the M1 continued as an excellent weapon, more durable than the carbine, and, although much heavier, it was preferred by most Marines. A carbine bullet would not always stop an enemy soldier, and the weapon rusted too easily.

Next to his rifle, the infantryman cherished the tank, which, like a lumbering elephant, could either strike terror into a foe or be a gentle servant to a friend. On the open field, hospital corpsmen, moving behind a tank, could get to the wounded and safely bring them off. In attack, the Marine tank-

²⁸ The flame-throwing tank, recommended after Tarawa, appeared first on Saipan. Actually, it was the M3A1 light tank, mounting a flamethrower. Although the 318th Fighter Group pioneered in the use of napalm fire bombs during operations in the Marianas, no napalm was yet on hand for flamethrowers, only fuel oil, and the range was still too short.

²⁹ *4th MarDiv OpRpt.*

infantry team felt itself unbeatable, and the Saipan experience added confidence. The medium tank would precede the riflemen who, in return, protected the tank from Japanese anti-tank grenades. Each half of the team needed the other.

Such interdependence, which marked the tank-infantry team, was illustrated in a thousand ways at Saipan, where Marines and soldiers fought a hard campaign side by side. The controversy arising from the relief of General Ralph Smith, which was to have repercussions beyond the war years, should not obscure the fact that on the battlefield itself there was neither place nor time for interservice rivalry. The merits of the relief, however much they were argued at headquarters throughout the chain of command back to Washington, were largely academic to the men locked in combat with the enemy. What they looked for was mutual support and cooperation—and they got it. To an infantry unit desperate for artillery support, it mattered little if the shells that crashed down ahead were fired by Marine or Army

batteries—only that they exploded when and where they were needed.

The same analogy applied to every phase of combat on Saipan, where the measure of value was how well each man stood his share of the common burden, not what his uniform color was when he stood clear of the mud and dust.

In truth, there could be no other answer to success in combat than interservice cooperation. The longer Army and Marine units fought together as partners with the Navy in the amphibious assaults in the Central Pacific, the surer would be the grounds for mutual understanding and respect. Admiral Nimitz, a man who was in an unrivalled position to assess the effect of the Smith against Smith controversy on future operations, noted that he was “particularly pleased that . . . the Army and Marine Corps continued to work together in harmony—and in effectiveness.”³⁰

³⁰ FAdm Chester W. Nimitz ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 8Jan63.